Mirage

Edgar Lee Masters

Maude C. Neville

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EDGAR LEE MASTERS

BONI AND LIVERIGHT
PUBLISHERS :: :: NEW YORK

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Printed in the United States of America

To

MY SISTER

MADELINE MASTERS STONE

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CHAPTER I

Becky Norris had just received the letter from Skeeters Kirby in answer to hers, in which she wrote him that he must not think of a marriage with her. She was still here in Maine, visiting with her friend Minette Shaw, whose husband, a realtor by occupation, had gone to Europe for the summer, leaving Minette well provided for in money and free to indulge her fancies.

Minette was somewhere in the house, attending to the duties of the morning, and she had left Becky to sit on the porch and read her mail, while the cool sea breezes blew from the purple hazes of the distance, and the bell buoy rang mournfully with the rise and fall of the mile-long waves. All night long Becky had heard the bell.

For she fell to wondering what Kirby would write her, or whether he would write her at all. She heard the clock strike up to twelve, then she missed its sound until two, and then she heard it again, as the bell buoy rang out, swelled and faded away in the mist which had overcast the full moon. She had got up to look at the moon, and remembering how often she and Kirby had seen it together, and under what happy circumstances, her heart moved in her breast.

Becky read over and over again the words which Kirby

had written her: "I am so glad that I always took your lips as I would those of an angel." "I give you back to the cool hepaticas of last year." She could see that these words were intended to deceive other eyes, if the letter should be lost or mislaid, and come to the vision of a stranger, revealing the secret which lay between Becky and him. His nobility stirred her emotions; little tears started from her eyes. Then after all why leave Kirby, why had she written him that letter, a letter in fact of farewell? She knew how proud he was, and that he would not pursue her, or thrust an unwelcome and entreating presence upon her. Would she now see him again?

She was wondering about herself, too. Was she hard and selfish, and petted? Had her marriage to a rich and ageing man, and his indulgence of her made her more capricious and changeable and reckless? What was this fire of her which burned to her own tormenting, and yet seemed to be under the control of a sort of cruelty in her nature? Was she hard and self-sufficient, and had the great passion of Kirby melted her heart? That had happened, to be sure, but then she had hardened again; she had mastered herself and gone away from him more than once. And she remembered the occasion when she stretched her hands to him, and with downcast eyes had said, "I dare not let myself go all in all." It was then that something in her nature, resembling a brake, had asserted its power over the soul dedication that Kirby had almost won from her. That was it, for she had learned that a woman can give herself to the man who loves her, and yet withhold the complete spiritual dedication that he seeks as the most priceless treasure of all things.

She seemed to herself something like the asphaltum of

the pavement which melts to the July sun, and then hardens under the heat and the traffic. She had hardened, she had mastered herself, after giving herself; and though conscious of the great sacrifice which Kirby had made for her, and in honor of her peace of mind and her name, she had persisted in this course toward him; and finally she had written the letter of farewell and put away the love that she had inspired and he had given her. Her greatest desire was to be free to follow her own will, and she could not do that with Kirby. She had found him too masterful, too dominating, and thus what would marriage with him come to? There was the matter of her settling her love life, but could it be done? She had deceived herself with the argument that friendship between a man and a woman was the highest relationship possible, and she had once written him: "The love stuff I don't believe in. In twenty-four hours lovers turn traitors. In one moment it is a beatific vision, it is dirty in a different light." In a manner she believed this. Her experience with an impotent husband had twisted her thinking and her emotional nature, and the affairs that she had gone through while he was living, casual, furtive and of short duration, had revolted her soul. She knew that to some women, particularly to Constance, her friend of more than sixty, she appeared a paragon of virtue and purity; and if she so appeared, what had these little amours done to her to lower her essential character? Having done these things, what was to hinder her doing them again? Why marry Kirby or any one else, in order to solve her love life, when the solution meant a daily living with him, and the possible boredom of it, and the tangle of hostile wills?

These considerations had hardened her resolution against the step of marriage, at the very moment when her passion for Kirby and her admiration of his nature had almost melted her to complete surrender. Here on this porch in Maine, taking the cool sea breeze upon her cheeks she was safe and free. There was no danger now, not even as little tears misted her eyes as she read: "I give you back to the cool hepaticas of last year."

Then as Minette called to her from the head of the stairs, a vision of Julian Delaher came into her mind. Having put Kirby away, why not call Julian back? The two were associated together, ever since she had run away from Kirby the first time, in that first May, and had gone to New York, half wishing and half fearing to see Julian. She had lied to Kirby about Julian, too, telling him that once when her husband was living and she was tortured with the life she was then having with this elderly husband, she had called Julian to her from New York to the great house on the Rock River in Illinois; and that he had not come, but instead had written her that he was packed and on his way down the steps when he resolved not to incur the danger of a discovering husband. She had lied to Kirby about this; for Julian had come, and in the absence of Mr. Norris at a political convention in Chicago she and Julian had become lovers. And she had lied to Kirby when she returned from New York in that May, having told him at leaving that she intended to tell the "satchel man" that she had met a real man at last. "Meaning you, Skeet," she said, giving him her lips. And Kirby had replied, "Well, Becky, I think a taunt like that might put you in peril; for you couldn't say a thing like that except under circumstances of privacy that would give oppor-

tunity for a masculine retaliation, if he chose to resort to one." "Oh, no," she said. Yet she had seen Julian on this visit to New York and had indulged her passion with him. She had returned and faced Kirby with angry equivocations.

And now she was thinking of Julian, just as Minette called to her from the head of the stair, and soon walked on to the porch to suggest to Becky that they take a trip to New York.

"It is pretty cool here. I'd like it warmer. And it's dull here. We can't have any fun here; and we are now rested up for anything. What do you say, Becky? Telegraph to Skeeters to come on, and I'll telegraph to Jay. I know he's in town, and its midsummer, and the market is dull and we can have a lot of fun, dining, playing and doing whatever we please. Telegraph to Skeeters."

"No," said Becky, and she picked his letter from her lap as she continued, "I've just had a letter from him." Minette waited for Becky to make some revelation of its contents. Instead Becky said, "I love Skeet; I am not in love with him, but I love him."

"So I have heard you say before," returned Minette; "and I don't see the difference between the two any more than I did when I heard you say that the other day. One thing I do know, Becky: you act as if you thought about Skeet a lot. I think it must be about him when you seem to be brooding. Anyway, love or in love, the thing for us to do is to go to New York; and you can let Julian know that you are there, and between him and Jay and the others we can have a very gay time." "Oh, yes, a gay time as always. I know all about it. What I should have done was to have gone to Europe when I had the

chance. Constance's sister and the children are in Switzerland now, and later are going on to India. They wanted me to go; and like a fool I have stayed on here, and I don't know why."

"Skeeters Kirby," laughed Minette.

"Yes, fool that I am. But I am loyal, Minette, and I thought it would be rotten for me to go away now."

"But what can you do?"

"Nothing."

"Do you expect to see him?"

"No."

"Well, I don't get it. Unless somewhere in your heart you do expect to see him. For surely now that he is a free man there is no reason why you shouldn't marry him if you want to."

"I don't want to—that's just it."

Minette looked at Becky, trying to fathom her mind, but she only said: "Your hair is more beautiful than I ever saw it, Becky. The natural color is more beautiful than that flaxen color that you had a while ago."

"Yes, and I haven't done a thing to it, but have it brushed and let it alone, and I have done that mostly myself."

"It's very lovely now, about the color of ox blood or strawberries or something like it, and it glistens like sunlight. . . Well, what do you say, shall I telegraph Jay that we are coming, and shall I wire for rooms? . . . Let's not go to the Ritzdorf this time. I don't see why you are so devoted to that old pile."

"That's where I want to stop."

"Very well, shall I telegraph them?"

"You'd better let me, Minette, for I have stopped there

so much, ever since my husband and I used to go there, that they always take special pains to please me. And then all the maids there know me, and the *masseuse*, Janet, who always does me so much good. I don't really feel at home anywhere else like I do at the Ritzdorf. So if we go, there's where we'll stay."

"Very well . . . shall we go?"

"I don't know what to do. I don't feel well. I ache all through, and my nerves are on edge."

"I don't wonder a bit. You won't golf, or walk, or play tennis; you don't like to motor. You just sit here, Becky, and lounge in our room, and you don't stir around enough to feel energetic and buoyant."

Becky made no reply to these strictures of Minette. She only looked at her, then across the water where one could almost see the bell buoy as it swung up and down; and where one could quite locate it from the rise and fall of its melancholy sound. The morning had dawned bright and mild, but now in an instant the wind came up out of the sea, cool and damp, and the mists beyond the rocks began to film the farther distances of water. "You must have a jacket, Becky," said Minette. And she went in to get one; but Becky arose and with something of a melancholy weariness followed her friend in to the dining room, and beyond into the living room, where a fire of big logs was smouldering. Minette closed the front door and stirred the fire, while Becky sat down before it and seemed to reflect. There were times when Becky fell into ways that reminded one of a sweet old woman. She had little habits of acting and looking that so reminded one; and sometimes she threw over her shoulders a shawl of pure white cashmere, embroidered in red and purple Arabic

design, which gave her the look of elderly kindliness; and then at such times her voice was sweet and musical, and had no trace in it of the harsh stridency that it had when she was excited or angry. Minette had brought her this shawl, and Becky put it around her shoulders slowly and listlessly, as she looked into the brightening fire.

"What is the matter, Becky? Bad news from Skeeters?"

"No, that does not worry me at all. It's just this: I seem to whiffle around and do nothing; and go to one place and then another; and to be tired all the time, and to have no peace at all. If it isn't my business affairs in Illinois, it's my nerves here; and if it isn't my nerves then it's trying to decide what to do and where to go; and it's always packing and unpacking, and trying to decide what to do, when a higher power than I am should have hold of my affairs and life and tell me what to do."

"Well, honestly, Becky, sometimes I really believe if you had a child, and had to think of the child, it would take your mind off yourself and be good for you."

"I wanted a child when I was married. But you know . . . that was denied me. Just before I left home I got out the baby clothes I bought in India and China and looked at them again, and lived over that desperate disappointment. . . That hope has gone up into the attic with the toys of childhood."

"Absurd, Becky! You are not too old to have a child, even though you have never had one. . . Thirty-four is not too old, and as for the father . . . honestly I believe you love this Skeeters Kirby, and if you do your life is adjusted right now, and you do not know it."

"I suppose a woman is a fool," said Becky. "Especially if she is a coward, as I am. Skeeters wanted me

to have a child with him before he was free to marry me; and of course I wouldn't. I remember the day I went and got the box that I keep those baby clothes in and showed them to him; and, Minette, I wish you could have seen his expression. You never saw a man as sensitive and tender as he is. And I was telling him what I had hoped; for before that I had told him that I was never really married, you know: . . . 'I can't look at them any more,' he said, and turned away."

"Well, why don't you marry him now?"

"I'd never think of it, Minette."

"Why?"

"Because I wish to be free; and I'd be less free with him than with any man I know."

"What shall we have for luncheon, Becky? I must attend to that now. And what shall I do about telegraphing Jay? . . . and if we go to the Ritzdorf, will you attend to that?"

"Yes. This cold here gets into my very bones. Just think, July, and such cold. I believe it would do us good. Perhaps if we see some people and get gay I'll feel better."

"All right, it's a go." And Minette went to the kitchen to order the luncheon.

Becky ascended to her room, and with a shudder contemplated the task of packing. She felt very tired this morning, with a kind of nervous weakness, and sinking of the heart. Her daily physical life of reclining and lounging and doing nothing enervated her; but also her state of mind, her longings and her discontentment aggravated her ennui. She went to the window and looked out upon the sea. The sky was overcast now, and the fog was twisting over the water, as a landward breeze blew

it toward her. And she stood thinking of Skeeters Kirby. What was he doing now, was he thinking of her, was he hating her now, did he still love her, was he trying to master, to kill his love for her? Did he think her unjust toward him? He had made great sacrifices for her, to protect her name. Did he consider that he had been badly repaid for his devotion in the circumstance that she had written him the letter to which his letter now in her hand was the noble reply? He had reason to hate her; and was it true that he had conquered his natural disposition to hate her by a supreme act of generous good will? How terrible would be his judgment if he knew that she had gone to Julian Delaher from his arms in that May of nearly two years ago! And that now, in spite of the fact that she cared less for Julian than for him, she would probably return to Julian's arms in New York on this contemplated visit!

Becky was wondering if all women were like herself. Did all women feel as she did: that one man did not suffice for all hours and moods; and for the rest dedications were —fateful and as they would be, and were not to be considered as part of one's nature and as deliberate expressions of it? One thing was sure, no woman fancied herself more clever about her life than Becky did; and thinking this of herself she planned to telegraph the Rev. Merrill that she was coming to New York; for she always had about her people of the intellectual life, and the good life. It was her taste, but it was a taste that surrounded her with protection against talk . . . as she believed. If the Rev. Merrill and his wife, and certain editors of the lesser magazines called upon her in her suite in the afternoon it was a protecting prologue to gayer times in the late

afternoon or at night, even if Minette should go away somewhere with Jay Sheridan and leave her to the sole use of the suite. And there was another thing: she made it a point to have many men about her, and by this course to mystify her friends as to the identity of the favorite man. Indeed she denied that there was one . . . all were friends, none was a lover.

Thus thinking, Becky began listlessly to take her dresses from the hangers and place them in her trunks. And the bell buoy rang and died away as the wind blew and veered, and Becky paused at times to listen to it, and to wonder about her life, and to feel in her eyes something like tears. She placed Kirby's letter in one of the little drawers of a trunk. Then as Minette called her to luncheon, she paused a moment at the window to look out upon the sea upon which the struggling sun shone in places, as the afternoon breeze blew stronger, from the waste of water far away.

CHAPTER II

On that night at the Rock River Cabin of George Higgins, Bob Hayden and Higgins had waited in vain for Kirby to return to them. Why did he in the midst of their talk arise and walk away so unceremoniously, with something of a melodramatic gesture? Both the men knew that Kirby had gone through a distressing domestic catastrophe. For Higgins had told Hayden what the latter did not already know; and in particular about Kirby's surrendering to Alicia, as the price of a divorce, the sum of $70,000, all he had in the world but a few thousand; and that he did it to protect a woman's name, or rather had to do it for the divorce, which would at the same time protect a woman's name. They talked in part of this matter while waiting for Kirby to return from his mysterious disappearance toward the river; and then they went over the plans for the morrow. Hayden was going to New York. He could not return to St. Louis in this heat, and then he was worn out with his work and his associations there; and needed a change. His friend, Murray Mitchell, had invited him to come to New York and stay for the summer, or as long as he could. Mrs. Mitchell had gone to Europe, and they could have the apartment to themselves. Hayden had done this for the two summers that were past; and it meant an inexpensive and pleasant change from the daily

monotony of St. Louis. . . He was looking forward to New York with as much delight as he could contemplate anything, for in his present mood of weariness and boredom he could scarcely find heart for life.

"You're going up to the Dells," said Hayden to Higgins as they sat in front of the cabin. The whippoorwills were calling now, and the mosquitoes were singing about their heads and biting them on their exposed ankles and arms. Brose Horne had put away his banjo, and was smoking a pipe, which helped to keep the annoying insects away. "Yes, up to the Dells," returned George, "and I won't be back while this heat is on. Give my regards to Murray and tell him I'll be down in September."

The air was still as silence itself, and the heat weighed upon the river's shore like a woolen blanket. "Where in the hell did Skeeters go?" asked Bob after a pause. "Damned if I know," said George. "The poor devil has had a hard time of it. I don't wonder that he is blue. That music got on him, too. How did you happen to play 'The Swan,' Brose?"

Brose Horne took his pipe from his mouth to say that he was just playing along, and thought that there was something in the key of 'The Swan' that suited Bob's talk. "You mean all that about the statue of Jesus in the Andes, and the coming of ultimate peace." "Yes," answered Brose.

"Well, all that is good for music, but it will be a long while before we get peace on this earth."

"Didn't I say as much?" asked Bob.

"You did, you prophesied a great war. But as far as that is concerned, is there anything peaceful about 'The

Swan'? It is about the most disturbing echo of a wounded soul that I ever heard. And it set Skeeters off, I'm sure. And so he disappeared."

Meanwhile, it had grown eleven o'clock, and as Kirby did not return, the men went into the cabin and retired. . . Kirby had stood in a sort of trance by a tree on the river shore, until nearly this time; then he had walked up the road past the poplars that grew in front of Becky's house. He paused when he saw a light in the upper window. It was one of these windows of the little library where he had spent so many blissful hours with Becky. His heart thrilled and stirred with pain, and he felt the tears in his eyes. Was Becky in that room at this moment? Had she written him from Maine, and had she had the letter posted by some one, after she had started west, and was she there now . . . and perhaps thinking of him and waiting for him to come to her? He could not resist the idea of going to the door and finding out for himself whether or not she had returned. Ah! how capricious and changeable she was! And how like her to write him this letter of farewell; and then to steal back, and wait for him, and when he came to her to give him her lips and look into his eyes, with their flames of delight and love overwhelming him with passionate splendor. Before he knew what he was doing he had passed the iron gate and was far up the graveled walk that led to the sacred door of Becky's mansion. Then he looked up and saw that the light was burning quite brightly in the library; and if Becky was not here, but only Nora, who would come to his ring of the bell, what should he say? If he only had one of Becky's books along, and could say to Nora that he was going away, and that he

had come to bring it back so that it would not be lost in his absence. Well, he could say that he had called to leave his address for Becky, that he was going into the Dells, for a few weeks. No! that would not do, for why not send Becky his address, if he knew where to write her? And would he dare to disclose to Nora with her keen Irish understanding, and her readiness to smile, the fact that he did not know where to write her mistress? And thus he stood trying to think of something to say to Nora if it should chance that Becky was not here. He thought of an excuse at last, for coming to Becky's house: He had loaned Becky his Æschylus . . . indeed he had given it to her, but Nora would not know that. And he would tell Nora that he was going into the woods on a fishing trip and wanted the book to take along. So having decided upon his excuse for the call, he rang the bell. . .

And in an instant the lights in the lower hall were snapped on!

Becky was surely here. How he remembered! And how she used to run down these steps to unfasten the door, and throw her arms about him and kiss him! Would it be so now? His heart almost stifled with these memories. And soon the door was opened and Nora greeted him. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Kirby!"

"Yes, Nora, and it's a shame to disturb you at this hour; but I am going away on a fishing trip, and there is a book here that I loaned to Mrs. Norris and I want to take it with me."

"Sure I don't know where it is Mr. Kirby, but come in, sir, and look for yourself."

Becky was not here!

And so Kirby entered, walking sadly along the stairway, with its many betrayals of the absence of the careful mistress, whose artist eyes and hand made everything beautiful where she was. "It will be in the library," said Kirby; and Nora answered: "Come up and look." And he went, standing first at the door to scan the photographs on the wall, the Buddha on the library table . . . everything that spoke of Becky; and his own picture on the wall, too, in its place of honor at the center of other photographs. Logs were on the andirons ready to light; and the tall golden bottle of brandy from which he and Becky had drunk in the cool days, after walks, after his return from cold rides, stood in its place on the table reminding him of happiness that was gone . . . never, perhaps, to return. And in this silver dish by the bottle there were English walnuts, with the silver cracker lying on them. How often they had taken a brandy and then eased its sting by eating walnuts, which they had cracked for each other. And here in this couch in front of the fireplace . . . what long evenings together in each other's arms, looking into the flames, in a bliss, a peace that cannot be told, and perhaps can only be lived briefly before they go forever!

"What kind of a book is it Mr. Kirby?"

"A blue book, Nora. It's Æschylus."

Nora could not pronounce Æschylus; but she said "A blue book," and she proceeded to overhaul the books on the little stand between the couch in the corner and the window, and also the books lying around the bust of Buddha on the great library table. "I'll look in the bedroom," said Kirby, and he crossed the hall, and entered where he had slept so often. There was a little stand in

the center of the room; and he went to it and stood by it, fingering the small Shelley which lay upon it. Here, too, was a golden bottle of priceless whisky; and through the French door in front of him, which opened upon a porch where he and Becky had so often been together, the straggling, misty rays of a worn midnight moon fell upon the floor. And to his left was the door leading to the bath, which had a door opening into the little library. And he thought of one night in particular, when he lay in this bed, and while waiting for Becky to come to him had fallen into a doze which was disturbed by the wisp of her little feet upon the tapestry; and how he had suddenly come to, and arisen from the bed, and walked to her to take her into his arms, and so to realize that what looked like silver mist was the odorous presence of her exquisite flesh. No more of this! He could stand to be here no more; and just now Nora called to him from the library. She had found the book, his name was in it; and she had laboriously spelled Æschylus in the title. He went to the library. "That's the book, Nora . . . and many thanks. . . Sorry to disturb you at this hour." . . . "But it's too bad you are going away. Mrs. Norris is coming back in a few days."

"You think so," said Kirby cautiously.

"This week. . . I wouldn't be surprised."

"Oh, you know she changes her mind, Nora . . . she may and she may not."

"You're right, Mr. Kirby."

And they talked of the heat and other things, and Kirby returned to the dark cabin by the river. He went in, to find that all his companions were asleep. Tomorrow he would be alone. Bob was off to New York;

George was going to the Dells; Brose Horne was back with the vaudeville company. He would be alone; but Becky might return. And for all that he had said that Becky was not for him; that she was elfin and angelic, but not for him; that she would blur his vision of life, and trammel his freedom if he won her, he could not in the stillness of this midnight adhere to the resolution that she was not for him, nor believe in the reasons for that resolution. He had never denied in these assertions of his will to freedom and individuality that he did not love her. He had always confessed his love to his most secret thoughts; and he confessed it now with a long sigh and a pain at his heart.

And what is love of man for woman? Kirby made a mystical thing of it, for which sacrifices were to be made and suffering to be endured, and forgiveness to be granted. And if he won and married Becky, what did it matter if she hurt and almost enslaved him . . . was it not for the sake of love? He saw the two paths before him now: one was the path of ambition and achievement, in freedom but in loneliness, and above all separated from Becky. The other was a life with Becky, with ambition forgotten, but with his nature appeased and justified by life as her fated husband. What path should he take? What was the ultimate thing in life: achievement or heart's desire? What great ones had not looked upon their triumphs and their fame in the desolation of a starved heart? And so reflecting he fell into sleep, having decided that he would wait for Becky to return. Their love was not at an end, in spite of her letter to him, and his letter to her. He would wait for her to come back,

and they would meet and all would be as it had been before.

The next morning Kirby awoke very early, it was about five o'clock. The air was cooler than it had been the night before, and the brilliant morning sunlight fell through the space between the window frame and the shade and danced upon the floor. Kirby listened for evidence of his friends' coming out of sleep; but they rested for more than an hour yet; when finally Bob Hayden began to repeat something from Horace, rolling the Latin from his deep voice. And soon George came to with a song; and Henry North stirred out of bed and dressed and went to the kitchen to prepare the breakfast. All the men noticed the change which had come over Kirby's spirits. He was gayer and more buoyant than he had been for the whole time of this visit of his friends; and Brose Horne celebrated the occasion with a performance of "Turkey in the Straw," as the smoke from the frying bacon rose to their nostrils and whetted their appetites for breakfast.

"What are you going to do when we are gone?" asked Bob Hayden as they drew up to the table.

"I am going to stay here for a few days," he answered. And the men observed the bright light in his face and wondered about it. What had happened in the night to dispel the oppressive gloom that had drawn him away from their society? "What are you going to do here?" asked Bob. "I have something I want to write." They didn't believe him; but they accepted what he said, and turned the subject to consider trains which would bring them into Chicago in time for the trains east and north with which George and Bob had planned to connect.

"Well, Skeeters," said Bob, "Go ahead and write; put your great vim into something. You know what I think of your gifts . . . so go to it with my good wishes and belief in you. You'll hit it better than ever. And I'd like to see you drop the pseudonym of Willis Aronkeil . . . no sense in that."

"I wonder, however, how I am going to live . . . how I shall live even if I don't make a success? You fellows know that I am pretty well stripped . . . only a few thousand left. And the interest from that won't support me. While if I live off the principal it will soon be gone."

"Marry the widow," said George laconically.

"No, never that. That's all settled . . . won't do . . . not with any idea of writing. I'd never write a line if I married her. She's too preoccupying."

"Why write?" asked George. "It's lots more fun and more worth while to live. . . Happiness is the only end."

"So I have thought often, but I can't get away from my star, my god that keeps hounding and hunting me. . . . I can't. So I suppose I'll go on somehow. But that matter of money worries me."

"Ain't it tough, Bob? Here was Skeet with a nice fortune of $80,000; and he could have lived in leisure and developed his talent; and he has to give it away to the woman he married in order to get rid of her and play the gallant part to another woman. I say it's tough and rotten."

"It is. If I ever got hold of that much money, I'd like to see the woman that could get it away from me. I'd go to Madagascar and live in order to get away from her and keep it. And she could take a divorce or go to hell, just as she pleased."

"No you wouldn't Bob, not if you were placed as I was. You would do what I did, and then some, if necessary."

Then the time came for the men to go to the village for the train. And Henry came up with the Ford and took them. This was Henry's last task; for supposing that Kirby was to close the cabin he had made ready to pay a visit in an adjoining county. It was a somewhat sad parting at the village between Kirby and his friends. All of them felt the pathos of the separation and hid it under banter and humorous sallies. But the return to the cabin was depressing to Kirby. He did not know what was ahead of him; and now the cabin seemed emptied of its soul. There were the dishes on the table from which they had eaten so little a while before, and cigar stubs which Bob had left on the mantel, and one of George's books was on the table. Henry set about to clean up the dishes, and that was soon done. Then he came for his pay and was off. And in the early afternoon Kirby was sitting alone in front of the cabin, listening to the melancholy song of a bird by the river and wondering when Becky would come.

He rose and cooked his own meals, and washed the dishes and read and tried to write and walked, and sat by the cabin in the darkness and retired with sighs and arose with hope fresh for another day of expectation. Yet Becky did not return. He knew she was still away, for he had telephoned her house from the village several times. And at last when a week elapsed and she didn't come, he packed and prepared to go to New York. Why?

He could think of no one who could do for him in this hour what Bob Hayden could do. He stopped in the

village to get what mail there was for him and to leave forwarding directions. He found a letter from his mother in Italy. There was also his bank statement. These he put into his pocket, and hurried to the stores to pay some bills. He entered the train at last, having forgotten to read his mother's letter, as well as to look at the bank statement. All the way to Chicago he sat as if in a trance, concentrated upon his problems.

CHAPTER III

Becky and Minette were at the Ritzdorf, in a suite of two rooms, one a sleeping chamber, the other a parlor; and both rooms were huge and furnished in the soft and padded luxury of the style of that hotel. There were two great windows looking on to the east and west street, which ran in front of the hotel; and two windows which were at the side of the building, and from which one looking out could see the delivery wagons that drew up to the hotel. There was a mantel opposite the side windows and various prints and etchings on the walls, and stands for books and for writing, and many luxurious chairs.

No sooner had Becky and Minette arrived than Becky began to telephone and send out notes that she was in town; and soon the tables and the mantels were covered with flowers, and notes arrived; and she was telephoned by Julian Delaher, and Mrs. Merrill and the old women whom Becky affected. The Rev. Merrill, also a newspaper man between his theological duties, had come to pay his respects to Becky, and to talk politics and international affairs with her.

"How do you know all these things Becky?" Minette asked.

"Oh, just reading about them," Becky replied. In truth she had no particular information on such things.

But she was quick to pick up bits of news and comments; and what she lacked in understanding she made up in the vehemence at times with which she expressed her opinions. . . . And already they had had many dinners with Jay Sheridan, who had come to see Minette, and Julian Delaher who had called upon Becky as soon as she telephoned him that she was in town. There were others, too, who dropped in generally at tea time; but for the most part the parties were cocktail affairs, with Jay Sheridan as mixer for the company. Sometimes the dinner table spread in Becky's room was graced by six or eight, all men for the most part, except on an occasion or two when Constance had come in at about the dinner hour and was prevailed upon to stay. Once Constance brought with her Mrs. Levering who was an enormously rich woman, living sometimes in New York, and at other times abroad, and who had never married after the loss of a handsome husband, who had brought about a divorce from her in order to marry a younger woman. Her money had not availed to save her the disruption of her domestic life. And now she drifted about, a somewhat pathetic figure, sometimes speaking with noble resignation of the man whom she still loved, and whom she could not find it in her heart to blame for deserting her.

In addition to these Bob Hayden had dined with the crowd twice within a few days of his arrival in New York, one time bringing Murray Mitchell with him. It had happened in this way: Becky knew of Bob Hayden through Kirby; and as she was a hunter of celebrities she managed to get hold of him as soon as she knew he was in town. Bob had been visiting with some of the news-

paper men and regaling them with the latest western wit and stories; and an item had appeared in one of the evening papers to the effect that the genial Bob Hayden of St. Louis was looking over Broadway and visiting the theatres and galleries. When Becky saw this she began to plan a way to have him come to her, not so much because he was a friend of Kirby's and in that capacity would give her a communion with him, but because of Hayden's name and the excitement it would cause among her group that she could bring to her a man of such distinction. She knew well enough that the Rev. Merrill was a mediocre mind and that his notability was of no great moment. Then as to Constance who affected the occult, which Becky also pretended to be interested in, she was good enough to make an impression with Minette and the rather unintelligent business men that constituted the group; yet Constance was a little erratic in her way and talk, and tiresome with her repetitions of her life in India.

Then Evelyn Lyman had called upon Becky, but more as a matter of social etiquette than otherwise, and in response to Becky's telephone to come to tea. They had never been on good terms since Evelyn's visit to Becky in the Rock River house, when Evelyn after listening to Becky's talk about Schopenhauer, and the "World as Will and Idea," until she was tired to death, since she did not know what Becky was saying, had picked up the huge work in three volumes, and finding that the leaves were not cut, had said to Becky, "Why, Becky, the leaves of these books are not cut yet!" Then Becky became furious and said that the set she had read was loaned to a friend who had not returned it and that she

had just bought this new set. . . . "You don't suppose I'd lie about a thing like that."

"Of course not," "Well you do," retorted Becky, "and it's very insolent of you to speak in that manner while a guest in my house." That was the beginning of the end of Evelyn's visit to Becky in the West; and ever since they had treated each other with a certain formality, an unfortunate ending of an association which had dated from their early girlhood.

These were the people who came to Becky's room in the Ritzdorf, and where Becky bore all the expense of the dining, even though Julian Delaher and Jay Sheridan scarcely missed a night when they did not come to dinner. It ministered to Becky's pride to pay the bills; and though she was not generous in many other ways, she did not mind handing out the money, or signing the checks for the rich and abundant food that was consumed nightly by the four of them, or the eight of them, if so many chanced to be present. Bob Hayden had with his usual keenness of eye observed this trait of Becky's. Walking up Fifth Avenue the night that he and Murray Mitchell had dined with Becky, and the crowd, he said to Murray: "Did you notice the way Becky paid for the dinner, for all that crowd?" "I noticed the way that fellow, Delaher, and that fellow, Sheridan, didn't offer to pay for it. They are the real boys there. You saw that."

"Of course I saw it. But Becky has the true Irish trait, the pride of wanting to foot the bills. Did you ever see an Irishman, reputed of good heart, who wouldn't pay for all the drinks, and wouldn't allow anyone else to . . . or buy a meal? Yet that kind is likely to be

close and selfish as hell and cold as ice about a lot of other things."

"Well, I'll bet Becky is. Her face is awfully hard and vain."

"It is. And I know a young fellow out west who is wild about her. Gee! but what an experience he had gone through for her."

"You don't tell me! What is it?"

"Oh, I couldn't. It wouldn't be fair. But of course she and Delaher are mixed."

"Yes."

"And Minette and Sheridan are mixed."

"I know about that for sure. It's been talked of here. Well, Minette's husband is a poor thing, with protruding teeth and a dull mind . . . has money, though, made in real estate, and inherited and made out of investments. He maintains an apartment here for a girl; and Minette knows it, so she does as she pleases, and her husband can do what he pleases . . . she has the goods on him. He's in Europe now anyway; and so Minette can run down to New York and see Jay to her heart's content."

Bob had spoken to Becky and to Minette and also to the others in the course of conversation of a friend of his who had a wonderful stock of wines and whiskies which he wanted to dispose of in part, owing to the fact that he was moving west; and Bob had added that he wished he could buy some of it himself. The idea lodged in Becky's mind for she was always looking for choice liquors for herself and her guests, and there was a chance to do a little better on the price with this man. It was convenient also to have what she wanted of wine and whisky in her room, and not to have it brought in by the

waiters. But Minette was saying that perhaps Bob Hayden would contribute something of the kind to the parties that they were giving, and of which he might be a member from time to time, having already started so well. Thus it happened on an evening when Bob came to dinner again that he was given further insight into Becky's character and the manner of life she was leading, as shown by the people with whom she surrounded herself.

In the afternoon of this day Bob had called upon Hanson Halliwell who had been a publisher in the West and had come East to take the vice-presidency of one of the large publishing corporations. They had been friends of some years' standing, and they no sooner met than both made the remark, almost simultaneously, that they were to be dinner companions at Becky's this evening. Bob looked at Halliwell, as if to invite some comment about Becky; for he was interested in the daily information that was coming to him about her, and wholly without his seeking it. "She's an odd creature," said Halliwell, "but wonderfully charming and hospitable. But I ask you, does every one in America write? Is every one a poet or a philosopher?"

"Nearly every one," answered Bob. "And I understand Becky is. Didn't she print a little book a few years ago?"

"Yes, I brought it out for her out West. She had a little newspaper experience, before she married Charley Norris, and that evidently gave her the itch. After she was married she had lots of money, and old Charley humored her in every way, evidently to keep her contented. She came in to Chicago one day to see me about

her book; and I give you my word, Bob, she was the prettiest woman that day that I ever saw. She was dressed in lavender, with a lavender hat, which suited her coloring and her red hair in a wonderful way. And she danced in on me with her shining eyes and her musical voice, and her manuscript."

"And you fell for it."

"Why naturally, seeing that she guaranteed the house against loss. So I brought the book out."

"Say this is all becoming clearer and clearer to me." And Bob laughed obstreperously. "Damned if I don't remember that book! It was about fairies and gnomes and things."

"Yes."

"I was supposed to review it, but couldn't. My God, you can't review all the books. And then she used to write me letters. . . ."

"I'll bet she did. She writes every one who has a name, here or abroad. Say Bob, we're dining with the lady tonight; this is pretty raw."

"Nothing like knowing one's hostess before the time of the dinner."

"Well, I'll tell you something strictly on the q.t. She was down here the other day and brought me five manuscripts: a book of poems, a book of plays, a book of prose epigrams, a short novel, and something else, I can't remember."

"She's a prolific lady, I'd say."

"Well, these were the work of some years, I think, off and on. So I turned them over to a reader, and I should have sent them back to her today except for the fact that I had accepted this invitation to dinner. That

might cast a gloom on the festivities, for they are the most sentimental and impossible stuff that you ever read, and no one could print them. She had tried these out on Clark & Company, as I have heard since, and they wouldn't print them, though urged to do so by some one on their list."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I'll bet I do. This is getting funnier and funnier and sadder and sadder. My friend Kirby was her sponsor with Clark & Company . . . that's a cinch."

"I'm going to have to break away tonight right after dinner," said Halliwell. "My wife is returning to the city and I have to meet her . . . and I can't tell her either where I have been, for she hates Becky above all women. You know the women. They understand each other sometimes when the men go it blind."

Jay Sheridan had taken a room in the Ritzdorf during the stay of Minette and Becky in town. This afternoon Jay and Minette were in Jay's room on another floor, having parted with Becky and Julian, on the half smiling pretense that they were going out to look at some pictures. Julian had brought his dinner suit to the hotel, intending after an afternoon with Becky under the arrangement thus mutually made to go to Jay's room and dress when he did. It happened in this way; and thus before the others arrived, Julian and Jay were with Minette and Becky all dressed for the occasion, and Jay was shaking the cocktails, and there was laughter, and kisses and embraces all around, as Becky was telling them at Minette's request of the great fortune that had come to Becky this day.

"She has sold five books to a publisher, and got $3,000 in advance royalties. Tell them Becky."

"That's it," said Becky. "I went down to see a publisher with five manuscripts, and they took all of them, and the books will be out this fall or next spring."

"What are you going to do with the money, Becky?" asked Julian.

"Give it to the poor. Oh, Minette, I have just thought of something. Wouldn't it be lovely to found a ward in some hospital in memory of my daddy? Just look at that face." And Becky took from the mantel a photograph of her deceased husband and handed it around.

"Such a generous face," said Jay.

"And yet people wonder why I don't marry again. How could I after having such a soul as that in my life?"

This remark rather stunned Delaher, considering his relations with Becky. And as he dimly hoped to marry her, and even felt sure that he could in view of the intimacy that existed between them, he looked at her in a questioning way, and then decided that Becky was just hiding her devotion to him under a feminine protective coloration. But Minette was mystified; for she would have married Jay, if her husband could be disposed of in some way not too difficult and delaying. As for Jay, he took Becky's remark to be a pure piece of melodrama, but passed it off with the observation that marriage was pretty bad unless the parties to it had a very deep love for each other; whereupon Minette gave him a quick glance, as all of them pricked up ears on account of a knock on the door. A bell boy entered with the card of Louis Hewitt, the Shakespearean scholar, and it was for Becky.

"Tell him to come up, please," said Becky. Then turning to the others she began to giggle and dance about the room. "What's the matter?" they all asked in chorus.

"It's Louis Hewitt," she said.

"Who's Louis Hewitt?"

"Why, don't you know? He's the great Shakespearean scholar."

"I never knew of the like of the people that Becky knows! Where do you find them?"

Becky had attached Hewitt to her list of notables by writing him a very flattering letter about his book on "Mistress Davenant," and later by subscribing to $1,000 worth of stock in a magazine which Hewitt was conducting, which she had done with a magnificent gesture, as she would sign tickets for meals in the room, or give the waiter five dollars for serving her. She had carried on a correspondence with Hewitt for some time; and then on one of her trips to New York she had brought with her an essay on Shakespeare, which she tried to get Hewitt to print in the magazine. The poor man couldn't do it, without making his publication ridiculous; and this infuriated Becky, who was now giggling and dancing about the room at the opportunity which had come to her of humiliating the great man. Before he entered she said to the others: "Men are so frightfully egotistical. They write a book, or run a magazine, or even lecture, and then they go around expecting every one to bow down to them. For that matter who is Shakespeare? He was a playwright, whom the English by ceaseless propaganda have made into the greatest figure of time, greater even than Jesus to some people. And yet he went moan-

ing around about a woman, and writing plays about her; and after all is said and done, he didn't write anything but pessimistic stuff, and quotable things . . . no great philosophy that people can live by . . . no great character painted . . . all weaklings like himself. And as for fame! What is it? Why I have been in places in the world where they had never heard of Shakespeare's name. And yet you find these men around here in New York who have written essays or little poems, and who are only known in New York, and you would think from the way they carry themselves that God Himself had his eye on them for fear they would get away and the world go smash." By this time Hewitt was ushered in. He was a brisk person with an intense, almost fierce expression; and in a very gallant way he kissed Becky's hand and bowed with fine courtesy to the others as they were introduced to him. They took seats as Becky did, who sat in a tense posture, her hands on her knees, slightly bent forward, her large eyes fastened steadily upon the distinguished visitor, who was saying that he was giving a lecture this night on the Kantian philosophy; and he was using the phrase "apodeictic certainty," as he outlined hurriedly what he intended to say. "How would you like to have a drink?" Becky asked, with a smile. "It might clear your mind a little."

"You think it needs clearing?" he asked, astonished and embarrassed at this curt interruption of his monologue.

"I do," retorted Becky, "Considering the use you make of the term 'apodeictic certainty.'"

"You are a very insolent woman," said Hewitt, losing his temper completely; and setting the untouched drink

which had been handed him upon the table, he said rising: "I have the honor to bid you good evening." Then he strode majestically from the room. Becky giggled; then as he got out of hearing she laughed loud, and almost screamed her mirth, while the others joined in in wondering delight.

In a few minutes Bob Hayden and Hanson Halliwell arrived, and the drinks were served again, and the company dined. Bob knew exactly how to handle Becky, and that he could carry her along and study her to the best advantage by flattering her. He pretended to believe everything she said to him, and when she got the picture of her dead husband from the mantel and showed it to him, he said with ingratiating understanding, "A fine face, Becky Norris, and a fine spirit you show in your memory of him, a worthy soul, beautifully cherished."

"Did you hear that?" said Becky with radiant face. "You are a wonder, Bob, just as I always heard you were," and she jumped from her seat and planted a kiss upon his mouth. "And I am paid with usury," said Bob, "and I think it's time for another drink."

And they drank again. "Look here, Bob, how about that friend of yours who has that wine and liquor to sell . . . that wonderful stuff?"

"Yes," joined in Minette, "when are you going to get it for us?"

"Anytime."

"Anytime is now."

"We'd have to telephone in order to be sure that he is in."

"Bob! telephone now, and see if you can't get it to-

night. I am afraid you will drift off, or forget it, and you'll never get it for us."

All of them insisted, and Bob stepped to the telephone and made the arrangements for coming this night to get the liquor. The man lived far up town, but it was not so much out of Bob's way in returning to the apartment of Murray Mitchell.

Meanwhile, Bob had seen enough to fortify his previous guess that Becky was paired with Julian Delaher, and Minette with Jay Sheridan. Becky had seated Bob to her right, and Jay across from her; but he noticed that Julian paid Becky little attentions, rose from the table to bring her what she wished, and looked at her with eyes of admiration which to the experienced sense of Bob was unmistakable. He saw also that these men were just good fellows about town, well dressed and well behaved, and familiar with society, and with aristocratic living. Becky was saying that Jay was a deep student of international law, and had developed a new theory of constitutional power in the senate. Bob in a winning and assuring way drew Jay out into a statement of his theory, gently suggesting and expounding, so that Jay and the others thought that Jay was doing the thinking, and not Bob. All the while Bob saw that the poor man did not know what he was talking about; he saw that his mind was off on a crude tangent, impelled by conceptions half-formed and half fantastic. And Halliwell, better read and better disciplined than the others, except Bob Hayden, followed the talk, and knew that Sheridan was only a shallow pretense.

Becky was hoping that Halliwell would say something about her books. But as he didn't mention the subject,

she took his silence ominously, and thought it the part of prudence not to ask him what their fate was, for fear there would be an exposure of her boast made earlier in the evening to Jay and Julian.

It was ten o'clock now and Halliwell had to leave to meet the train on which his wife was returning to the city. "Give Mona my love," said Becky, as Halliwell was departing. "And tell her to come to see me." But when Halliwell was gone, Becky, thinking that Halliwell's silence boded no good for her books, and resenting the fact, she added to the others: "I just said that for politeness sake; for I don't want her. She is foolish enough to fancy that I had a romance with her husband. And just fancy!"

"Well, would you blame him for trying, Mistress Becky," said Bob with a laugh. "And as he failed, if he tried, why not be generous?"

"Bob Hayden, you're a peach . . . you know he did fail if he tried. I am not the romancing or marrying sort . . . and after a while I'll have every one convinced of it."

"I'll help you," said Bob. "I'll spread the word."

"Well, you do it. And what time, may I ask, were you going for that liquor? You and Jay go up together. . . ."

"Ten thirty. What time is it?"

"It's after ten now. I think I had better telephone that we will come so that he won't wait for us and be disappointed."

Bob stepped to the telephone and told his friend that they would soon be on their way. Meanwhile Minette had gone to Becky's bedroom and put on her hat; for she

thought it would be a good time to leave Becky and Julian to themselves. They were a merry party now, being well stimulated, while Julian in the toils of drink and desire was pressing Becky's foot with his under the table, and squeezing her hand when stooping to pick up his napkin, which he had dropped for the opportunity of doing so. Then Bob and Jay and Minette went out and hailed a taxi and drove far up town to get the liquor.

Mr. Edwards was an old time friend of Bob Hayden's, and naturally would not question the reliability of the people that Bob was bringing to him for its purchase. He had the liquor all tied in bundles ready for taking away; and he had opened a fresh bottle of old whisky to give the party a drink when they arrived. He served it in the butler's pantry, then walked back to the front room with Jay and Minette, leaving Bob to talk for a moment with Mrs. Edwards. As Bob returned to the others he overheard the last words of a conversation between Mr. Edwards and Jay, in which Mr. Edwards was saying: "You are Bob Hayden's friends and that will be all right with me."

Bob sensed that something was wrong, and divined that an arrangement was being made for the payment of the liquor, which might embarrass him. "What is it?" asked Bob, for he knew that Jay was a poor creature, and he began to be ashamed of himself that he had come at this hour and distance on an errand of this sort; but having done so he did not intend to be made use of in this fashion, and be stuck possibly for the price of the liquor.

Mr. Edwards replied: "Mr. Sheridan will send me

his check tomorrow. It's $180, and they are your friends, so it's all right."

"Well," said Bob with some spirit, "why not a check tonight?"

"I haven't a check with me," said Sheridan.

"Here's one," said Bob, taking a check from a book in his pocket. Minette looked quickly at Bob, then at Jay. Mr. Edwards handed Jay a fountain pen, and Jay passed it on to Minette with the remark, "you fill it in and I'll sign it." And Minette sat down, rather resignedly and drew the check, which Jay signed and handed to Mr. Edwards. Bob was thinking, "something wrong here; but the exact thing is too deep for me." And then he wondered if the check would be good, and if not he resolved that rather than allow his friend to lose he would make the check good. "What messes we get ourselves into in this going around. . . . I am a sort of fool, too." This episode made conversation difficult on the way back. These two had supposed that Bob would be too much under the influence of the good will, and the hospitality of the evening to rise so quickly to an overthrow of their plan of using Bob; and as they rode along the feeling of the moment was hidden under all sorts of disconnected talk about little things; and when they came to the apartment of Murray Mitchell, Bob said a friendly good night and went in.

Meanwhile Julian was asleep on Becky's bed, and Becky was holding before her eyes a volume of Plato, not a word of which she could understand in her present condition. Expecting now momentarily that Jay and Minette would be back, she went into the bed room and shook Julian, to which he drowsily responded, "What

is it?"—Then she handled him roughly, and took him by the hair. "How dare you lie here this way. Get up. Sit up. They will be back any minute."

"Huh?"

"Get up. Put on your coat. Comb your hair."

By this time Delaher was fully awake, but was sitting on the edge of the bed, running his hands over his face in an endeavor to clear his eyes and his thoughts. Becky grabbed him now with a strong hand and pulled him to a standing position. "What is the matter with you? You will embarrass me."

"Embarrass you!" he sneered.

"Get out of my room."

"No I won't."

"I'll have you put out."

"No, you won't."

He stood before her, growing very angry now. But Becky was angry, too, and full of audacity. She added: "How would it look for you to be lying here, and in this state, and have them come in and see you?"

"Well, what the hell," he growled. "You don't suppose they believe we were reading the Bible while they were gone. They know."

"They don't know. And no one knows anything about me. Don't you dare to talk this way to me."

"Oh, I'll say anything I damn please. I'll go and tell Skeeters Kirby all about you if I want to . . . the man who is a man, as you said that time. You be damned with your uppishness and your hypocrisy. I'm tired of it; and pretty soon I'll be tired of you."

Becky became afraid of him. And as she saw him retreat to the bath room to wash his face, she thought it

wise to let this blow over, and to wait for a better time to retaliate upon him. He came out presently looking more sober, his hair combed; and after he had taken a drink of Scotch whisky, he was calm and amiable again. All was well, when Minette and Jay arrived. Becky was reading Plato to Julian; and the chauffeur carried in the spoils of the evening, and they opened the packages amid sighs of delight. Then they made merry till one o'clock when Jay and Julian departed leaving Minette and Becky to couch in the twin beds, and to sleep till noon the next day, when they arose to put themselves in readiness with hairdressers and *masseuses* for more festivities.

CHAPTER IV

Kirby arrived in Chicago on his way to New York at about five in the evening. He felt lonely and depressed, and began to wonder where he would stay for the night, and how he would spend the evening. Thoughts came to him of the strangeness of the position which time and circumstance had brought him to. There was the lovely apartment that he had occupied when he was married to Alicia; and now he was a wanderer without a home. He didn't belong to the club any longer; indeed in the changes which had come over the city the club had surrendered its charter, and the building was now given over to an advertising company. What hotel should he go to for the night? His absence from the city for these months, and his life in the country, made him feel strange to these streets of the city with which he had once been so familiar. And as he cast about in his mind in order to think of people whom he knew and whom he might see for the evening he found himself strangely at a loss. Would not one who had died, and who had been brought back to old haunts feel exactly as he did, as he walked from the station to the Loop?

Then what had become of his strength and his resolution, all those feelings of power that had come over him that day at the Rock River cabin when he saw himself naked in the mirror, and had come to self consciousness,

as it seemed, with the quotation of Goethe's lines, and the dedication of his life to the philosophy of daily winning freedom for his soul by daily conquering it? Strive as he would the memory of Becky took his strength and his will. He knew it and fought against the subjugation of his personality; and now he was on his way to New York, for no reason except to see Bob Hayden about Becky . . . and why should he do that? Why not stay here and master each day in some occupation . . . but what? He had none now. And when he reflected that his money would soon be gone, if he didn't add to it, fears coursed through him; and so thinking, and dreaming, and wondering he took his way.

On Monroe street he met Tom Megary, the detective whom he had sent to Cleveland to follow Alicia, there to get the truth about her secret life. Megary had married a woman out of a house of prostitution; and he had married Alicia, his mistress, and the mistress of other men before she was his. Here he was then face to face with Megary, two men whose fates were alike; both were divorced; both had tried the impossible and failed. Megary was standing at the entrance of a building with a little girl of about fourteen, whom he introduced to Kirby as his daughter; and so this was the child that Kirby some years before, while acting as counsel for Megary, had rescued from the contaminating clutches of its mother.

"Well, Mr. Kirby, how are you? I want you to meet my little girl. This is the one, you know."

Kirby was carrying a satchel, which he set down for a moment to take the hand of Megary's daughter, and to talk to the father.

"You look like you were traveling," Megary went on.

"Yes, I think I shall go to New York tomorrow. And I am trying to think of a place to stay for the night."

"Plenty of them."

"Oh, yes. But I want to get out of the Loop and I don't know where to go."

"The Bennington is all right, not far south, and pretty good now and under a new management."

Kirby began to reflect upon the neighborhood of the Bennington, as it was in that part of Chicago which he first knew when he came to the city, from Marshalltown; and the memories that flooded upon him filled him with sensations akin to a sickness of the heart. All these years gone, and all that youthful period vanished, and himself come to this state of soul and circumstance when it seemed to him that he had lived through the whole of life and nothing remained but refuse and triviality and decay!

"I am going down that way to take my little daughter to the place where she stays; and if you have time this evening I'd like to come over to the hotel and talk for a while."

Kirby had nothing else to do, so he assented to this, and parting with Megary and the little girl, he boarded a car for the south side. He left it in front of the building which was occupied as a cigar dealer, when he lived with Uncle Harvey at the boarding house, not a block away; and this was the place where he used to stand and talk with the cigar dealer, in those days when he was alone because he had not yet woven the fabric of his new life in the city. Now the building was occupied as a laundry, the cigar dealer was perhaps long dead; and as for himself he was alone, not because he had not yet

builded the house of his life, but because the house he had builded had been wrecked.

He crossed the street to the hotel, and stood for a moment in the lobby of the Bennington, which once had seemed so splendid to him. Now how shabby it was, in spite of its fresh paint and gilding! And what faces! Was America coming to these faces, these common, restless, well fed faces, these vulgar and noisy feeders and talkers, these hunters and guzzlers? Oh! he should have gone to one of the first class hotels down town; but then would he have seen a better class of people? Perhaps not, even though better dressed. Then as he put his name to the register he thought of the satirical circumstance that had caused him to meet Megary, and not to meet some of the professional or well-to-do people that he had known in the past years. His coming to this hotel was fated by just this meeting with Megary, the detective. Was there always to be something in his life to keep him away from the better havens which were close to his taste in matters of living, and which belonged to him as his heritage of blood? Then as he had written his name in the registry, and had come to the address line, he paused with a smile and a sadness of heart. For what was his residence? Not the Rock River cabin, but if not that then what? So he wrote the word "Chicago," and the clerk asked "A room with bath?" which he wanted, and so he was assigned and entered the stale elevator with the bell boy, and ascended to the eighth floor, from which he could see the Loop district lying under the heat and the smoke of this July evening; and at the sterile lake beyond the filthy outline of half wrecked and half built or decayed

buildings massed in the changing territory of twelfth street and nearer at hand.

He sat down in a rocking chair and looked out of the window. Where was Becky? With what sumptuousness was she surrounded in the indulgence of her luxurious tastes? What parties was she giving? Who had his arms about her? Who felt against his breast the yielding richness of her bosom; and against whose cheek was she brushing the inviting gesture of her ruddy hair, and what was she saying, and was her voice, the sweetest and most musical of all voices, ringing out in thrilling laughter? Or was she in one of her gentle moods, speaking of sympathy and kindness, and pity for suffering, and in understanding of the pain and the mystery of love? But was she not cruel and selfish? For what did she suppose he could be doing in this separation? Did she think that he was happy, that he had other arms about him and was content, that he was well placed and with satisfied heart? How could she think these things? And if she did not think them then was she not indifferent to his fate, and would she care, would she not laugh the elfin, teasing laugh that she sometimes laughed when they played together in the happy days that she had wrecked and deserted if she should look in upon him here and see him rocking in this squeaking chair, and looking out upon this monstrous back yard of the city's sordidness and malevolence?

Kirby could stand no more of these reflections, for his mind refused to go further. And so he arose aimlessly, and stood before the mirror of the dresser, wondering whether to unpack his grip and put his shirts and collars in the drawers. He saw his face in the mirror! What

was this face becoming? Was it to lose its look of happiness, its strength, its self-control? Was it to become streaked and loosened, and were the eyes to lose their steady brightness and become cloudy, or half invisible? But for that matter what had life not already done to this face in the more than ten years since he had come to this very neighborhood, a boy, almost, carrying a telescope satchel with the record of dreams dreamed amid the fields, but also carrying in his heart the wound of love for Winifred Hervey who had died. While he was standing here the telephone rang. Who could know that he was here? He answered it and found that Megary had already taken his daughter to her boarding place and had come for him. "Have you had your dinner?" asked Megary, "Come down and eat with me." There was nothing better to do. It was either this or dine alone, and then spend the evening by this window. And Kirby was thinking that there was a time when he would have gone forth into the town and found a woman; and now he had no heart for it in these preoccupations of thought about Becky. Well, Megary knew life and after all it might prove more interesting than to talk with some of the better men who might have been thrown his way this night.

After they had had the meal they sat in chairs in front of the hotel and smoked and talked. Kirby told Megary something of the way in which he had been living at the cabin; and Megary knew that Kirby had given up the law and gone to the country; for he had come to his office once with a matter of business and found that he was no longer there. Then as Megary had gone to Cleveland that time for the purpose of getting evidence respecting Alicia's life, and as he had read that Kirby

had been divorced from Alicia there was the background of these things for the talk which followed.

The street was full of automobiles passing back and forth in the endless and futile activity of the early evening. On the sidewalk there were the idlers and those out for a walk and an airing, young men and women arm in arm, lovers, married couples, street walkers, negroes dressed in bright plaids, in striking yellows, negro women powdered and rouged . . . these went to and fro; and Kirby's heart sickened; but then he thought it might not be amiss to study this phase of American life, while wondering if degeneration had not taken hold of the race and the country which would in time end its promise of glory. But perhaps this was only Chicago, with its mongrel breeds, its smoky air and architectural ugliness, its sterile spirituality. These were the phases of Chicago to which his present mood made him sensitive.

Megary was glad to see Kirby, and proud to be with him; but he had another motive for making this engagement, and that was the hope that he could interest Kirby in speculation. He knew that Kirby had once made $80,000 in a stock deal and therefore had a taste for the market; and as he had left the work of a detective to become a broker, he wanted Kirby's patronage, and while really desiring to see Kirby make some money, he wanted to add to his own profits. Later he intended to bring the conversation to this subject. But, meanwhile, Megary began to talk of life in general out of the great experience of his own life; for Kirby in looking at the crowds had raised the question if the country was not changing and for the worse. Thinking of Becky all the while, and wondering whether she was just like any woman who gives

herself out of wedlock to a man, and thinking of the old hard-cased judgments of his father that a loose woman is a loose woman, he had asked Megary what he thought about these things, and whether the women were not becoming more careless of the old standards; and whether the old virtue of chastity was any more to be found. He had also spoken of the fact that women were not punished for indiscretions as they used to be called, and as the past generation supposed was the sure fate of an unlicensed life. "The Scarlet Letter" was no longer worn; and the man suffered as much because of delinquencies as the woman did. Had it always been so?

"I was in the detective business for twenty years in this city," said Megary, "and I could tell you stories from now till next week that would show you that the world has always been the same. Why, twenty years ago there was a fast, rich married set that drank and gambled and swapped wives, just as they are doing today. It's human nature, and you can't stop human nature, no matter what you do. The women have always been promiscuous and they are now, and they always will be, and for a thousand different reasons as a matter of circumstances. They may be unhappily married, mismated; they may be full of ginger; they may want money . . . money, that's a big thing by itself. For either in marriage or in the love game it's money. I remember your saying once that millionaires stood no chance against the man of genius, the celebrity with the women. . . ."

"Did I say that?"

"You sure did, and I remember what we were talking about at the time. Have you changed your mind?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, it's true. Young women marry old fellows of sixty and seventy for money. It don't make any difference what they say about it, if they call it love, love for his mind you hear them say, or for his goodness . . . it's the money. They are not marrying old men who have minds and goodness, and not money. The old ones and the left overs will marry anybody. No, it's the money; and then they cheat. And then the sports pick up rich men to keep them, and then cheat on them; they get their money and play them for suckers, and that's the game. You used to hear more talk than you do now about the girl who is ruined. Now and then that happens, but it's in the village, and the girl is a poor fish or she wouldn't allow it to ruin her, that is not any more than it ruins the man. And I don't believe anyway that the village girl was often ruined. She was talked about and moved away and was lost to the village. But maybe she married a rich man, or got well placed in life; moving away wasn't ruin. I have known of some cases like that. This ruin business is the cheap stuff for preachers to talk, the poorest informed men about life in this world. It's the yellow stuff of the cheap novel, and the cheap melodrama, and it always was more or less."

"Well, don't you think that outside of the matter of gossip and what the community can do to a girl, that there may be ruin coming from a train of causes, and overtaking a girl's inner life, her mind, what preachers would call her soul?"

"I think that kind of punishment belongs as much to men as to women, if not more to men. Yes, it belongs more to men than to women, for the reason that men

have more brains than women, and see more things and feel more things."

"By the way, Megary, did you ever go to college?"

"Yes, and you can never tell what a man's people were, nor what his chances were, simply by judging by what his occupation is. I went to a military school and after that I went around the world. I have been in every country practically in the world. And I had the finest mother that a man ever had . . . well, and then I became a detective. How's that?"

"Funny!"

"Why, I didn't tell you half about my life when I came to you that time about my little girl. And I'm going to tell you something about it now, because it bears upon this man and woman business that we are discussing. . . I returned from my trip around the world, and for something to do for the time I went into a bank and was doing very well. I had all sorts of fine ideas about life and women, about the purity of women and their being better than men, and always being wronged by men; and I was living in a city of about forty thousand, there with my mother, and a crusade started to drive the houses of prostitution out of town, close them up and so forth. Well, you can do that after a fashion, but not even that entirely; but one thing is sure you can't stop the thing they do in such places. What they do there is only what is being done by the widow and the married woman who cheats, and the girl who has learned the game, and you can't stop it. But the preachers think you can, and so you have these crusades. Well, I got interested in this crusade, and I thought the girls in these places were treated like slaves and all that. And one night I had a

chance to go out with a bunch trying to get evidence. And right there was where I got started in the detective business . . . it led to it . . . and so much for a man's controlling his own life. All right! We went into a place where there were about six girls, and over in the corner there was a girl with a very pretty face, and innocent, too. And I went over to talk to her. I asked her how she got here and all that. . . . She opened right up, perhaps because she saw that I was green. She said she was a waitress in a restaurant, and that a man who took his meals there ruined her, promised to marry her, and ruined her. He set her up, and she had an abortion and nearly died. All this happened in a small town, and of course there was talk. Well, maybe she was ruined with the church people there, but that's luck, and what of it? If they don't want you, and so you are ruined, then what? Go out somewhere else. So she said being ruined she went into this life . . . and here she was, and she cried and begged me to take her out of the house. She knew I was soft. So I took her out that very night. I took her to a small hotel and put her up. The next day I went to see her . . . I didn't make an advance to her at all. She was mighty pretty and her story was sad, she was the wronged girl, and it began to get into my head that I would be doing a fine thing to marry her, and make a good woman of her. I didn't tell my mother and couldn't. . . But one day I took her from the hotel and married her. Now who gets the worst of it? The bank found it out finally and let me out. So my job was part of the price of this chivalry . . . and talking of chivalry you'll find that it's that that makes more trouble for men than anything else. The ruined

girl! That lie of these two-by-four preachers, that and other of their lies have made more suffering for the world than all the booze. For they make people do foolish things on the basis of such a falsification of life. Well, she wasn't the ruined girl at all, as you will see. For what did she do? If she had been the ruined girl wouldn't she have been grateful for what I did for her, and glad of the chance to live a decent life? She didn't care if I lost my job in the bank so long as I got the money for her. So losing my job I came to Chicago and went into the detective business, and my mother was almost heartbroken . . . after all she had done to educate me and give me that trip around the world. . . The baby was born finally, that little girl you saw this afternoon . . . and she was the rottenest housekeeper you ever saw. She didn't take any interest in the house or the baby. She left it with the neighbors and went off gadding. And I got suspicious and had her watched. She was cheating on me. Why? The ruined girl that I had 'saved' was cheating on me . . . cheating on me like the women married to rich old men cheat on their husbands, like the young married women do the same, like the sweethearts cheat on their lovers . . . and why? All because human nature is always the same, they are all alike, all of them, there are only a few virtuous ones, and they are virtuous because they have to be . . . no opportunity or something. Look at these people going along here . . . only one thing is in their minds when you get into the central wheels that move their beings . . . and yet you try to stop this! And the preachers think if you do away with liquor you reduce lust by taking away the thing that excites it most. It is to laugh! . . . Well,

I caught her and canned her, and took the child, and I am educating the child, and God knows what she will be after all."

"Now answer me truly," interrupted Kirby, "What was your life, were you good to her, did you give her cause to betray you?"

"I'll answer that by asking you something: Did you ever know of a man or a husband who did everything for the wife or the woman he loved, and yet the wife or the woman was faithless?"

"Yes, I have," and he thought of his own case with Becky. "But it might be something else. A man might be conscientious, and yet not be the right mate."

"That's true enough. But if that's the case why not say so to the man? Why hang on for the sake of the money, or for something else?"

"They don't always hang on."

"Well, if they don't they have something they like better, and can marry or get more money. The moral of it all is that there are no ruined women, any more than there are ruined men. Look what this woman might have done to me, what she did do to me; for I am not such a hell of a success as it is; though I got married again, and to a nice little woman; and now I am trying to educate my little girl and get her started in this game of life with which nobody can do anything very much. I went into the broker business. I think I sent you some announcement and letters about the market."

"I never got them."

"Well, I sent them to you, and if you want my tips or services any time, look me up. For you know I have always been grateful to you for the way you handled my

case and got my little girl permanently out of contact with her mother."

"What is she doing now?"

"Oh, she's around town. She's living along, married again, and cheating as usual, I suppose. She comes around every now and then and gets a few dollars from me. And I let her have it in order to keep her in a good humor so that she won't take revenge upon me by trying again to bother with my little girl."

"Well," said Kirby, "this is all very interesting, but after all it raises the question with me as to what a man shall do with his life, he can't live alone, he inevitably falls in love, he has a desire if you want to call it just that. And the question is what shall he do?"

"Take a drink. I think a nice sloe gin rickey would go fine now and I'll be glad to buy. Will you have one?"

Kirby assented and they went to the bar of the hotel. They drank, and shook hands and parted; and Kirby returned to his room. A mist had come up out of the lake; the fog horn was blowing and from a nearby saloon he could hear the rattle of a rag time piano. Life was coarse and foul and wretched here. And he was lonely, he felt soiled and abandoned. And he went to bed to toss for half the night.

CHAPTER V

The next morning he awoke feeling that he was deserted, that life had slipped through his fingers. What was left? Was it worth while to struggle for freedom of spirit? To what end; what was the consummation? He ran over the philosophies with which he was familiar. Who was the wisest of all the wise men of the world? Was life Vanity and that alone, as the author of Ecclesiastes had written? He had observed his father's life and its end, and the lives of his relatives and their end, and what did it all come to? Was his mother happy, still in far away Italy; and was his sister Myrtle happy wedded to a foreigner, and living the life of that country, and perhaps at its best? Would they help him if he came to distress? For he began to think of his ebbing finances and what he should do to strengthen them and to go on—but to what end or use? He knew that as a young man in the early thirties he should not indulge these pessimistic thoughts about his future. He had strength, and why could he not make his way? But to what end, for whom, for what?

Was Goethe right who made self culture, and activity justifications for living, and recompense for the daily trial; or was Shakespeare right who called life the tale of an idiot. . . . And then he thought of Becky; he rarely awoke in the morning without thinking of her

and it happened so this morning. Very clearly this morning she had come into his mind as an insane woman, eccentric to the point of insanity. Well, if so, was she not in her feminine aspect and nature simply more feminine than most other women, and by that token more insane than other women? She had wound him in a coil of Circean madness, and though he had resisted her, and then forgiven her after hating her, and doubting her, still she held him. For it takes strength to hate, and to forgive and to doubt. It takes strength to forget and even memory is emphasized in the effort to erase one's mind of the imprint of a woman. He remembered all his feelings on that evening he stood by the tree, where he had first met Becky; how as he approached the tree he thought he saw her standing by it waiting for him; and it was only the simulation of her to his wounded and hoping heart, woven of summer grass, whitened by the sun. Always deceived! He saw himself as an idealist in a materialistic world and doomed to continual defeat and betrayal. He despised himself now for having forgiven her, for having written her that magnanimous letter; for what was she doing now? Why fly him, if all that Megary in his cynical way had said was not true? She had another man, and while writing him that letter protesting her friendship she was already involved in another amour. Did she not stress sex by pretending to deny it; and was she not all sex in the circumstance of all her dishonesties with herself and with him, in all her involutions of nature and of hiding what was burning so constantly within her?

What time and energy he had wasted in following her devious moods, her charming deceits and fancies. And

if the cup of moly which Ulysses drank to protect him against Circe, and preserve him from the fate of his comrades who were turned into swine . . . if the cup of moly in his case with Becky was the resolution he had made to forgive her and stay away from her and forget her, having possessed her, and by the nature of life being unable to do more with her, to what had she given birth in this union of theirs which would come to him hereafter, and with what kind of disaster? What would be the Telegonus in his case to come to waste the fields of his later life; and if resisted to run him through with the spear which she had sharpened? And after all this to be lying here with hope that he would see her again, that he would win her again, that even upon this contemplated trip to New York he might find her, yes, at the Ritzdorf where she always stopped! Were these days now not the fields that her influence had come to waste, and was not the spear some definite agony or catastrophe ahead which he could not foresee? And yet perhaps by going to New York he was bringing its deadly point to his breast. Why not be a master man and make her the one to be the sufferer, and not himself? No, there are no ruined women, save as there are ruined men! Yet he could not stay in this hotel, nor in Chicago. There was better life in New York and Bob Hayden was there. He must see him in this hour, this prolongation of the hour of separation from Becky. He had never told Bob nor anyone the whole truth about himself and Becky. He had indeed lied about it; but now if he told Bob all that had been between them, perhaps he would get a light upon his problem and extricate himself from its toils.

He got up and dressed himself, packed his grip, and

descended to the cafe for breakfast. Still in a measure pondering the trip to New York he went to the desk to look up the trains, and finding that there was one which left at one thirty, he started for the ticket office down town to get his reservations. Putting his ticket and his berth in his pocket, he came out of the office and as he had time on his hands he decided to run over to Megary's for a few minutes. The morning paper had a report of the rise in wheat, and there was something of the gambler in Kirby's nature which made him respond to a chance to win. Megary was there to add to what the newspaper had prophesied and to urge him to buy wheat which would go much higher. And so he decided to take the chance. He left his check with Megary; but not wishing to lose in the present state of his finances he put a stop order on the purchase to prevent a greater loss than his deposit. Megary was called aside by other business and Kirby left in spite of Megary's request to wait a minute.

On the street he almost ran into a woman, who was hurrying along looking down. Coming out of the sudden embarrassment he saw that the woman was Charlotte Shanley who had been his secretary some years before. She was still very pretty, indeed with her somewhat distressed face she was prettier than ever; and he stopped to take her hand and ask her where she had been, and how life had fared with her. She had been out of town for a number of months; she was now out of work; but she said with pride that she had had something offered her, and that she might go to work on Monday.

This was Friday.

"Come in here, Charlotte, and have a soda. I am just

going to New York, but my train isn't due to leave for a while, and I have some time. I want to talk to you." And they entered a drug store where there were tables, and sat down.

Kirby noticed that Charlotte's dress was worn and faded; her hat was newer and better, and helped to save her general appearance. Her shoes were thin, and broken, and she looked at him in diffidence and as if she were ashamed. Kirby's heart was touched. She had been a wonderful secretary to him. What had happened to her? Was it some affair of the heart? If she could get work, and that must be true, what but some misadventure in romance could bring her to this poverty? He ventured to ask her: "What is the matter, Charlotte?"

"Nothing at all," she replied with a little smile. "Why?"

"Oh, yes there is. Where have you been, out of the city?"

"In Ohio."

"Working?"

"No."

Kirby paused in his interrogation. "It's kind of a secret," she went on. "I have been trying to help some one out."

"Out of what?"

"Out of trouble."

"I don't understand."

"I know you don't."

"Can you tell me? Perhaps I can help you."

"No, you can't."

"Well, one thing: I can give you some money for some clothes."

"Oh, no."

"Yes, for it's clear if you are helping some one, some one is not helping you in return . . . and he should."

"He?"

"Yes, he. You wouldn't be helping a woman to your own denial this way."

"You're a mind reader."

"That's very simple."

"Well, you have guessed it. I was working for a man here who got into trouble; and I was the one they wanted for a witness, because I knew about the books and such things; and so I went away so they couldn't get me in court."

"And he didn't do anything for you because he is broke?"

"Yes. I came back here yesterday, and I'm living incog, so to speak. I had to come back to confer with him about this matter, but I'm going to return to Ohio in just a few days, I think. I don't want that job here after all."

"You are done with the man?"

"I don't know."

"Well, here's thirty-five dollars. Go and get you a dress. This is all I can spare now."

He pushed the money into her hand, while she shrank and tried to refuse it. "You were always so kind to me, Mr. Kirby. I wish I had never had to leave you. It might have been all different with me if I hadn't left you. How funny that I should see you. It was all a chance in a million. I haven't been away from the place where I am staying but once, and I might have been

down town a dozen times without seeing you. It seems so mysterious."

"Are you going to marry the man?"

"I don't know."

"You are old enough to take care of yourself, every woman is these days, I think; but on the other hand don't waste your time in hoping."

"Not much longer, believe me."

"Oh, he's married and you're going through the experience of waiting for him to get free?"

"How did you know?"

"I didn't. I surmised that as one of the possible cases. And if he can't do anything for you, then perhaps it's a case of love."

"Perhaps?"

"Yes, for I don't believe in the love stuff very much, and when I see a case of it I am interested."

"You act changed, Mr. Kirby. I knew you when you were first married and seemed so happy. I hope you are not too unhappy . . . you deserve good things."

"Will you write me a letter?"

"Of course I will . . . where to?"

Kirby gave her his address in New York, and took her hand in parting. She smiled at him, and thanked him again and said, "I'll tell you what I'll write you . . . among other things. I'll send you this money back, soon, I hope. And perhaps I'll tell you why to-day this kindness of yours was such a blessing. Good-by."

Kirby turned to watch her as she walked away. She was pathetic enough, and perhaps she was a case of real devotion to an ideal. Then he went to the train.

CHAPTER VI

On the platform of the observation car, Kirby saw a woman sitting, dressed in a tailor suit of gray, a lavender straw hat on her golden head trimmed with the attractive flare of a purple ribbon. He scrutinized her as carefully as he could, as he passed on his way to the entrance of the train; but she looked straight ahead, into the dimness of the train shed, and seemed unconscious of his interest. After he had found his berth and placed his baggage away, he went to the observation car, with the hope of seeing the woman to more favorable advantage. He walked out upon the platform; but she gave him no chance to break the strangeness of the moment. Becky's attitude toward him had dulled his idealism so that he could even wish at times that some other woman would come along to lift him out of this useless obsession about her; and perhaps this was the woman.

The train started and he turned back into the car, almost running into Philip Newton, Dr. Newton as he was known by title, the "Grinner" Newton no less of the old days of Marshalltown. And this was the human being, now grown notable and dignified and self-sufficient, and with whom Kirby was graduated from the High School and with whom, some little while ago before he had given up his law office, he had come to spirited words over the

matter of national prohibition and Sabbath observance. After that he had seen a statement given out to the press by Dr. Newton in which that dignitary had scorned to reply to a correspondent of note who had taken him to task for protesting the plenary inspiration of the Bible; saying that he had no quarrel with avowed atheists, but only with theistic evolutionists, who stood for God, yet undermined Christianity in the name of science. Kirby loathed his old friend, for this artful dodge; and his present frame of mind was one of hardness and pugnacity.

Kirby believed that minds of the Dr. Newton type had extracted an entire culture, and fashioned a complete intellectual organum from the two equivokes of Jesus of Nazareth: the one when he failed to answer directly the question respecting the tribute money; and the other when he put his hecklers in a quandary by asking them whether the ministry of John the Baptist was of man or God. There was, in Kirby's estimation, a whole America of Dr. Newtons who thrived in an atmosphere of pious shiftiness; and it was this America that was more and more irritating his rebellious nature. With so much of misfortune in his life to stir his acridity, and sharpen his irony, the appearance of Dr. Newton was taken by him as an opportunity to attack the whole American culture which Newton seemed to represent. All that had happened to Kirby, the loss of Becky, his bitter contest with his wife, Alicia, fortified his courage to wage war upon this dishonesty for which Newton, as he thought, was the sophistical exponent. He planned to go to his berth and get the Bible from his grip and return to the observation car with it and read, and thus invite some comment from Newton which might lead to the things he wanted to say.

"Well, Arthur," exclaimed Newton, by way of greeting, extending a soft warm hand. "This is a pleasure. Going to New York?"

"Yes," replied Kirby, "and you?"

"For about a day only. I am sailing for Europe on Monday, going to Geneva to a convention of the churches. You are looking remarkably well."

"I am pretty well. Excuse me a minute. I am going into the car for a book, will be right back," and Kirby went on.

Newton took a seat and waited for Kirby to return. He saw the Bible in his hand and remarked: "You still read the good book, and still reject it, I suppose."

"No I accept it, as I accept the Hindu hymns, not otherwise."

"As of old. Well, I hope you'll change. Logically you accept it as the inspired word of God, or else you reject it, as the greatest fraud on earth, for it purports to be God's word, and if it isn't it is a snare and a fraud."

"Where does it purport to be God's word?"

"All through it, from the title page, to the last word of Revelations."

"Revelations! I was reading Revelations the other day, reading the notes of the book, in the Bible, notes that go forth to church people like you and beginners, students, as information on the book. Are you familiar with these notes?"

"I think so."

"Well, then, you know that the authorship of the book is not known. You know that from ancient times men of authority in the church have denied that John was

the author. You know that Luther relegated Revelations to an appendix along with the epistles of James and Jude, and the epistle to the Hebrews. You know that it is written in ungrammatical Greek, as pointed out in the third century by Dionysius, Bishop af Alexandria. And you know that quite recently the best scholars found reason to put Revelations entirely outside the field of Christian literature. But the point is you know that this critical information is contained in the notes to the standard editions of the Bible that are used by Sunday School teachers and students. Don't you?"

"Yes, but what has that to do with atheism?"

"Not a thing. Not any more than the notes about all the books about the Old Testament, for example, which say that the authorship of many of the books are unknown, and that it is a matter of conjecture with varying probability, who wrote them. The prophetical books, and that includes the prophecies with reference to the coming of Christ, as it is claimed, were not written by the men whose names they bear. All the historical books are anonymous; Job, Ecclesiastes are anonymous. It is nowhere stated in the Pentateuch that Moses wrote it; it is only assumed that he wrote it, because his name was traditionally associated with the promulgation of the law. You will find all through these books that the Lord is said to be speaking, but always through some anonymous mouth, and therefore there is no evidence so far as the reliability of the writer is concerned that the Lord did speak. You can't determine the reliability of a writer until you know who he is."

"Well, what does all this come to?"

"You'll see presently."

"What has all this to do with the hope and the ethical purification that the Bible gives?"

"Not a thing; and don't you shift your ground. We are talking now about the plenary inspiration of the Bible; and I am not really interested in that. The ground of discussion shifted long ago from matters of authenticity, to the matter of the soundness of the Christian philosophy. We take up again what Celsus discussed nearly two thousand years ago. And I go on to show you some other things. Look here: Here is the note to the Psalms, contained right in the Holy Bible for you and for students to see. It says here that all the Psalms were not written by David. Now that does not affect their poetry, but it does affect their standing as the word of God given through the mouth of David. . . . Let us pass to the New Testament, to the notes on the book of Mark. The book of Mark is the oldest, the first written of the gospels; but not a word in it about the virgin birth; and not a word in it about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead."

"Oh, yes there is."

"Not a word. It only says that a young man sitting in the supulchre told Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, that Jesus had risen and gone into Galilee. . . And the verses of the last chapter of Mark, beginning with 9 and including it, and ending with 20 and including it, in which it says as a gospel that Jesus rose and that he appeared to the eleven and others, and that he ascended into heaven—all this is not found in the two earliest manuscripts. And what does the note say as to

the authorship? That trustworthy details of Mark's later life are wanting; that according to tradition he was the founder of the church at Alexandria; that his gospel may have been written at Rome, between 63 and 66 A. D. Look! here is the note to the book for the use of Bible students, budding plenarians, preachers and teachers! Does anyone know that Mark wrote this book any more than he knows that Homer wrote Homer?"

"Don't ask me any questions, just go on, and I'll listen."

"Very good! Take the book of Matthew. The note says that Papias and Iranæus writing in the second century, state that Matthew wrote in Hebrew. Did he? The note goes on to say that the earliest citations from this book, made in the earlier half of the second century, give the exact words of the present Greek testament. Where is the Hebrew manuscript?"

"Oh, that is a matter for scholars."

"All right, we have the scholars with us. The note says that there is no trace of a Hebrew manuscript, and if there was such a thing it was superseded at a very early date by the Greek version. Always 'if,' 'probably' and all that. And then look: 'the very early date often assigned, 45 A. D., may be correct if applied to an Aramaic original; but the Greek gospel which we have may have been written about 60 A. D.' Take the gospel of Luke: the note says that it must have been written before the destruction of Jerusalem, probably at Rome about 63 A. D. Observe 'must' and 'probably'; but no facts given, and for the reason that no one knows. And this writer, whoever he is, recounts a great many miracles that none

of the others do; he gives sayings that none of the others do; he alone recounts the mockery of Herod, and the penitent robber, and the walk to Emmaus, when Christ appeared to two of them after his crucifixion; and above all he is the only gospel writer who mentions the ascension. That stupendous event is ignored by Matthew, by Mark and by the so-called beloved disciple, John."

"Oh, Arthur, this matter has been gone over again and again by great scholars, by men far beyond your knowledge, and even your ability, and yet this book stands as the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture, to use Gladstone's words."

"It stands just by saying it stands. And pretty soon I am going to touch upon a matter that affects our country, related as it is to this stupid mental attitude—if you will pardon me—which says that it stands. But first I want to say that this word of God, as it is stubbornly called, and idiotically accepted, as idiotically as the ancient peoples accepted the myths about Osiris and Attis and Adonis and the rest, is made to buttress the cosmology of the Book of Genesis and the miracles of the Old and New Testament. The miracles of Moses and Aaron, and Samson and Joshua, and Samuel and Elisha, and Jesus and the disciples are accepted on the basis that this book is the inspired word of God, and is wholly and every word true, when on the face of it it isn't, and as to these supernatural events it gives only the support of anonymous or doubtful authorship. And all this has nothing to do with the facts that have been ascertained concerning the myths of the Mediterranean, which relate to the virgin birth of gods and last suppers and all that,

myths which were believed five hundred years before Christ was born; nor has it to do with the fixing of Christmas day on the supposed birthday of the old god Mithra, and a hundred other things like that which shows that Christianity in its dogmas and its eschatology was a patch up from old myths and mysteries."

"Are you an atheist, Arthur?"

"I am not an atheist. I take God as an hypothesis, because the facts of life and the world harmonize in my mind with that assumption."

"Very well, if there is a God, why does he allow the world to be fooled by a book that is not his?"

"Why does he allow cancer, and war, and ignorance and poverty? Why did he allow the dark ages, and the black plague, and the slow groping amid death to the facts of tolerable living and the tolerable liberty that we have now? Why did he allow his book to be put forth in so doubtful a way that the best scholars, even your Christian scholars, cannot make out the facts of authorship or reconcile the disharmonies of the books? Why does he allow death? Why does he tell us nothing about the meaning of life, and in this very book give it no explanation, except that man sinned and fell, and that He had to sacrifice his Son, whose mystical blood redeems the world? Why have we no evidence of a future life that even theologians fully trust? For I was reading the other day of the death of a cardinal dying at an advanced age, and yet afraid, and crying for more faith, even as Jesus did in the last moments."

"Well, I simply say that life without Christ has no meaning whatever."

"And I say that life with Christ has no meaning whatever. He never said a word that had not been said before. He left no record of his life that can be relied on. His philosophy is Asiatic and worthless, almost, for the business of life, and immeasurably below the æsthetic reconciliations of the Greeks, and the high spirituality of the Hindus. The whole scheme of salvation is absurd. It is absurd to say that man is a sinner, and more absurd to say that Adam fell and in his fall all the succeeding generations fell; and it's absurd to say that his blood shed for the remission of sins remits sin; for what is remission without a cancellation of consequences? The philosophy of Jesus does not make a better civilization than the ancients had; it makes the world smug and slick and hypocritical, and mean of spirit and despotical, and cowardly, and afraid to face life; and it twists the human mind out of shape, and prostitutes its sense of logic, reality, truth. We do not see life steadily and see it whole through this doctrine. It furnishes to poor breeds the greatest pabulum the world has produced for oppression, ignorance, the imposition of one will upon another, the distortion of information, the denial of our natures. The cross has been the handle of the sword and always will be while the cross has power, and its bloodstained banner makes me weep, not for the blood of Jesus, which is on it, but for the blood of the hundreds of millions on it, shed for the remission of Jesus' sin in being born."

"Oh, pshaw! Arthur! I can confute you in a minute. If the Bible is not the work of God, it is the work of man, that's true, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Very well, if it is the work of man, man could write another, couldn't he?"

"Of course."

"Then why hasn't man written another?"

"I'll answer you by adopting the method of Jesus, that is, by asking you a question or two. Let us take Shakespeare: it was written by God or man wasn't it?"

"By man, by Shakespeare."

"Very well, why doesn't some one write another set of plays as good?"

"Hasn't it been done? At least wasn't it done before Shakespeare?"

"I think not. But even so. This matter of relative merit—goodness is not an absolute, provable thing. There are millions of men who accept the Koran, written after the Bible was; and esteemed by Mahommedans, to be as good or better than the Bible."

"But such people!"

"Yes, there's the old class and race superiority cropping out. Such people! Well, you know what they contributed to science and to mathematics and to chemistry and all that. But before the Bible there was the Hindu hymns held by hundreds of millions to be the highest divine wisdom; and they were written hundreds of years before the Bible was; and for myself I think these hymns contain more lofty doctrine than the Bible does, and I have as much right to my taste and belief as you have, or as all the millions of Christians have, since you can't prove anything to me . . . not from the notes to this Bible which I have in my hand. . . And here is some-

thing else: there is a book known as 'The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,' written more than a hundred years before Jesus was born, belonging to the pseudipigrapha, not included in the canon, and yet of such merit that the writers of the gospels, and Jesus himself, frequently used its words and its doctrines. It was written by some man, and by the use which was made of it, as I have said, is placed on an equality with the gospels themselves. So much for your fallacious argument."

"I am glad to hear you talk, even though I don't agree with you."

"But I wanted to say one other thing. What is all this proselyting about, all this raising of money, publishing of papers, building of colleges, sermonizing, lecturing, law making, proposals for a national observance of the Sabbath, interference by laws, police, with people's private life and tastes?"

"It is to make the world better, to Christianize the world."

"Yes, it is to bend every will to one will, one conception of life; it is to make the majority—if a majority can be created—into a despot, and to make the majority a ruler over the minority as to beliefs and tastes and modes of life. It is to violate that categorical imperative which generates just laws and constitutions, and forbids by its logical necessity all legislation that touches the man in his own soul. It is to create a state religion and nothing else. And I see coming in this country a tyranny greater than anything that has ever been known and meaner than the rule of the village fanatic. The Granger movement which started in '72 concerned itself with economic mat-

ters; and that was true of the upheaval of '96, though it took on a moralistic crusade, as all radicalisms do; and it has been growing. It feeds itself upon the denunciation and the hatred and the bitter idealism of the Hebrew prophets. It connects the breadless widow, and the natural failure, with the purpose of God to avenge their sufferings. You never saw a radical howling about the wrongs of the rich who was not himself crooked . . . nearly all of them are. They are poseurs, little screechers for notoriety, and befooled soft heads, sometimes, who go the limit and wake up at last, hungry and obscure. They are the outs who hate the ins; and you just give them a religious impulse, toward which they naturally lean anyway, and you will have a country here to make the gods shed tears. They will despotize this country; and as for me I see it coming with all this agitation and intermeddling and calling for national laws on divorce and temperance and Sabbath observance. Ever since the Civil War a conviction has been growing that there is such a thing as the American people en masse, in whom sovereignty rests; and that this American people can make any law it chooses. That idea subsumes the arguments of agitators and moralists, who care nothing about the great principles of Liberty, and the constitutional articles which express and safeguard it, but who are willing to throw down the whole fabric of American law to have their way. One day the country will see that Alexander Stephens was prophetical when he said that the cause of the South was the cause of the Republic. For when state sovereignty was so terribly wounded in the Civil War, then this idea that sovereignty resides in the American people

en masse took root, and it has grown to be the greatest weapon in the hands of Tories and fanatics that they have ever had. The Colonial business that we embarked on in 1898 evolved out of this fallacy. Also having got this idea going, men like you come along, who want to use it to get national laws on divorce and marriage, and liquor and religion. You are the people with whom a moral impulse suffices to enact any despotism, just as the old Centralists of sixty years ago used the negro question to imperialize the Republic."

"Isn't that an attack on Lincoln?" asked Newton.

"Not an attack, but a criticism," answered Kirby. "We must use our minds and face the facts, even if characters suffer that we would like to revere all in all. And that is another thing about Americans that we must correct."

"I am afraid you are getting warped, Arthur," said Newton, arising to go to the other car. He smiled benignantly upon his old school friend, and waved him a hurried adieu as he went out. Kirby, in possession of the field, suddenly recollected that he had not read his mother's letter, which he had thrust hurriedly in his pocket when leaving the station on the Rock River. So now he took it from his pocket and began to scan it:

"My Dear Son:

"You will be surprised to learn, no doubt, that I am returning to America, arriving in New York about September first. My place in Myrtle's household is not so agreeable as formerly, due to the attitude of the count; and the time has come for me to make a place of my own. I suppose that I can say to you that I have

had several offers of marriage since your father died; but in addition to the fact that I suspect most men, and believe they like my money better than they do me, I do not believe that at my age I should marry again. Fifty-two is no advanced age, and I am very well, but I have not yet met anyone with whom I thought a marriage would prove successful, and I mean to take no chances. This has led me naturally to plan, seeing that I may live many years yet. I need a home of my own; and though I love Italy and may return to it, I begin to long for America. At this stage of affairs a gentleman came to Rome who has about two hundred acres and an old house near Great Neck, Long Island; and he has offered it to me at what seems to be a bargain. I believe I shall buy it, fix over the house and have a fine place near New York. The question has arisen as to some one to live with. Davis has settled in California; and you seem to be the likely person, considering that you are divorced and somewhat adrift. My dear son, you never have understood me; and though I have given you great affection you have not returned it. You have thought that I was selfish, that I stood in your way to go to college, and I know you did not like it because I went to Italy and left your father. There is so much to say about all these things, about my married life, for example, that I can't write it now. But I shall say one thing which I hope will make an impression on you: I am sure you will be glad that I had the vision to get out and go away from Marshalltown, and not to rot down there as the women have done who have been compelled to stay there. You will be proud of me some day for all this, when you under-

standingly compare my face with the faces of the women who were only dutiful, good cooks and obedient wives, and who ended up in ignorance and soul surrender and village life. Now, what I have in mind is to propose to you to come and live with me, if I buy the Long Island place, and help me care for it, and help me with my property affairs, and be my associate and beloved son. For I am proud of you and love you, and I expect to be prouder of you still. Meet me in New York if you can. But in the meantime, cable me where you will be and if I may expect to see you when I land.

"Devotedly,

"Your Mother."

CHAPTER VII

This letter stirred the depths of Kirby's heart. The suffering which he was now enduring on account of Becky brightened his understanding, and intensified his capacity for feeling these soul secrets of other people; and in the case of his mother she stood before him more fully comprehended by his thinking and his intuitions than ever before in his life. Yes, he was glad she had gone away from Marshalltown, and glad that she had made this richer life for herself. For if she had stayed by the domestic hearth what would it have profited anyone? Davis' course in life had not been any better, apparently, nor his own. Perhaps it might have made some difference with his father. But what habits of coldness or selfishness was his father committed to which drove his mother in self-protection to seek her own life? Then he smiled to himself when he thought back into that far away time when his mother and Aunt Joana had quarreled over the pronunciation of the word "attorney," and how Aunt Joana when she came to die had willed the Texas land to his mother, which had produced oil, and so had brought her to this life of ease abroad, and Myrtle to the fulfillment of heart's desire in marrying a titled man. Was any life stranger than the lives of his family, and even of his own? What resolution and independence his mother had! How full of wraths, and endurances, and

self-reliance, and capacity to control her own heart! He had neglected her for long months, and even perhaps for years; but here she was maintaining her judgment of him, and confessing to an affection for him that had not been dimmed, it seemed, by separation and diverse interests. A thrill went through him. What possible consummation of wonder was ahead of him? If Becky was lost for good, perhaps he would live with his mother, as she now invited him to do, and who could tell but what that would be the solution above all others for his life, giving him peace and leisure and the association of interesting groups of people near New York, the center of publishing and artistic interests?

Making a note to cable his mother as soon as he arrived in New York he went to the platform of the observation car hoping for a chance to become acquainted with the beautiful woman he had seen when hurrying to board his train. She might prove to be something to him, she might heal him of Becky, who might be the half god and this woman the arriving deity. . . She was sitting in the same chair, as calm as a butterfly resting in the shadow of leaves. Her eyes were directed straight ahead of her, and Kirby could not break their concentration in that direction by the strength of his gaze, which he quickly left off to save himself from rudeness. She was very lovely in her fashionable traveling dress and becoming hat, underneath which her golden hair glistened and trembled to the swirl of the air as the train rushed forward. She held a book in her gloved hands, and in her lap was a hand-bag initialed in small gold letters. Kirby could not make them out. And still she looked ahead and took no notice of his presence.

They were passing through a country of green meadows and harvest fields growing golden to the reaper; and every now and then the train glided into the green cool shadows of woodlands into whose rich depths of refreshing verdure, lanced and shaken by some light Kirby glanced with pain and delight, as his heart reflected upon the woodlands around the Rock River, and his days among them with Becky. Why should she leave them for the heat and the excitement of New York, if she were now there, or for the unsettled living of a guest of some one in Maine? What did she find in either place so sweet as the country around her home? And to speak of himself, after all that they had been to each other, and lived with each other, whom could she find who would be to her the chum and the mate that he had been? Ah! had she not said that he never bored her, that he was a constant source of delight to her. Whimsical Becky! Mysterious Becky! Could Megary, the detective, be right? Was it all a matter of sex delight, and a change of mates in order to win the highest moments of ecstasy? Were there no women any more who gave themselves again and again in that spirit of alterocentric passion which considered the man? Well, had his mother done this? She was the chastest of women, that he knew; but what of that? She had left his father to shift for himself while she searched out more life for herself. And was not woman's psychology, whatever her course, whether as a wife or as a mistress, merely the consummated nature of the egg which attracts and absorbs, if not for the making of new life, then for the sustention of its own? . . . Who was this woman on the platform, and what was her story? Had she left a husband or a lover, or was she going to

one? . . . Then in these reflections Newton came to the platform and broke his speculations with the remark:

"What a lovely country here!"

They were passing far stretching meadows with red cattle grazing, and near at hand a drove of horses were feeding, which threw up their heads and raced off as the train growled and roared to a hollow forest at the other side of them. The woman did not turn her eyes, or take any note of the coming of Newton. She was not in a study either; she only seemed happily calm and concentrated with herself and the delight of the day. Then Newton and Kirby began to talk again, about the greatnesses and the richness of America, of whose future Kirby indulged so many doubtful speculations.

When they entered the diner the woman was already at a table. She looked past them, over their heads, through them, but not at them. Kirby was of a mind now to give her up. She was one of the kind not to be interested, not even by himself, young and athletic, and surely engaging enough. He thought he would try one more expedient. Later he would go to the observation car when it was dark, and perhaps then she would speak, or allow him to speak. And he did so, but she had vanished. The car itself was quite abandoned; and the porter was going about cleaning away the refuse of the day. No, this woman did not want him; and what did he want with her? He could not forget Becky in her presence, no matter how charming and yielding she might be to him.

But when they arrived at New York, Newton hurried on in his usual ostentation of something important to do; and as Kirby was making his way through the crowd he heard a voice, which seemed to be addressed to him,

and yet in the preoccupation of the moment and his planning to cable his mother, and look up Bob Hayden he was not definitely attracted, until the voice spoke again, being nearer now to him, and he turned to look into the smiling face of the woman whom he had tried to know in this journey and who was inquiring of him about a good hotel to go to for a few days before she sailed for Europe. She was more beautiful than he had imagined, and after the ride east she looked as fresh as the woodlands through which the train had glided the afternoon before. . . Kirby told her that he was taking a taxi and that he would be glad to take her to a hotel on his way to his own; and she smiled upon him and thanked him. "There are worlds of hotels, one hardly knows what to say . . . it depends."

"I know, but I haven't been in New York for ten years, and one gets out of touch with things."

Kirby thought he would take her to the Elizabeth, a small, elegant hotel. Well, why not go there himself? Surely she would not have spoken to him if she had not meant to give him her association. She was alone, no one met her; and with whom would she spend the time in New York before her steamer sailed? No, he would not stay where she did. There was Becky! Too much to settle, too many talks to be had with Bob Hayden. Still he thought he would provide for some dull hour, some failure of other plans. And so as he turned away, having taken her to the Elizabeth, he asked if he might call upon her, to which she assented. She was Miss Enright, and he gave her his name and hurried off to send a cable to his mother.

He went into the hotel to which he had directed his

mail to be sent. It was near the Ritzdorf, his will tugging against the choice, his imagination driving him to be near Becky if she were in town. What slavery he thought! And yet he could not throw it off. Should he try to find Becky at the Ritzdorf, or should he go directly to Bob Hayden? After all, what had he come to New York for? To see Bob Hayden. What about? About Becky? What could Bob do about Becky? Not a thing. What a fool he was after all!

He thought he must have his shoes polished. Then he needed a new suit, a two-piece suit. It had grown very hot, and the air was stale as of a room not ventilated, and which has been repeatedly overheated. He was too warmly dressed. Well, he was careless about such things, in the preoccupation of study and writing. The trip had wrinkled the suit he had on; and it was none too fresh. But it was too late this afternoon to buy a suit. And did he need it except for Becky's sake, who was always so particular about her own dress and about his, in the days when they saw much of each other? Tomorrow he would get a suit, however . . . if necessary. He bought an afternoon newspaper and entered a booth to have his shoes polished. As he unfolded the sheet he saw startling headlines. Julian Delaher had been arrested on a serious charge. There was an interview with the father of the girl who was nineteen. Delaher had given bail, and his lawyer had denounced the arrest as blackmail. There was an intimation in the report that another man was interested in her and that he had caused Delaher to be arrested.

"Well," thought Kirby to himself, "Becky has had nothing to do with Delaher. If she ever had this notori-

ety would cook his goose." He smiled to himself and came upon the street again.

Before him was the loftiness of the Ritzdorf. Was Becky under that roof? Should he go to her if she were there? Should he go straight to Bob Hayden? He walked nearer the Ritzdorf, looking up at one of its balconies as he did so. Once he and Becky had stood on one of those very balconies hand in hand, his arm about her. Yes, that was the very balcony, and he looked up at it. It was on an occasion that he had never told about. She had been east, up the Hudson, and he had come through and found her, not tangled with other engagements, no one else to take her time from him. He had come to her, first calling her on the desk phone, and then hurrying to her breathlessly, to find her alone and ecstatically glad to see him. What hours! They had dined together in her suite and spent a long evening together in bliss that made his heart quiver with the memory of it. And they had stood in the evening upon this balcony, and looked at a procession that was passing. And how strange! That was one of the pieces of evidence with which Alicia had extracted seventy thousand dollars from him in her divorce suit as the alternative of leaving Becky unmentioned in the proceedings; for some one passing below had seen him in the glare of the torches and the lights, or had seen him in the hall as he entered Becky's suite. But now he was free. He could go to her, and no one could question it. And she would receive him as of old.

But should he go to her? What of her flying him? What of her long silence toward him? What of her letter of farewell? What of her colorless notes when

she did write to him, and her heartless failure to send him a word of sympathy when his father died, and her complete ignoring of the enormous sacrifice he had made for her in the surrender of all that he had accumulated in life to protect her name in the court proceedings? And thinking these things he walked around the Ritzdorf again and again trying to resist, yet toying with the temptation.

At last he entered, picked up the desk telephone and called her. The clerk said she was stopping there. Back came her voice, then her chuckles, and her glad invitation to him to come up. And in a daze of delight Kirby took the elevator. In a moment he was knocking at the door!

CHAPTER VIII

Becky had turned from conversation with the Rev. Merrill and Mrs. Merrill to answer the telephone. A thrill of delight for the luck that she was in went through her in the circumstance that Kirby would enter to find her in the company of this gentleman of the cloth and his wife; for many days there had been fast times in the suite; and the night before there had been a riotous party. Delaher and Sheridan had dined with her and Minette. But before the dinner they had repaired repeatedly to the room of a Colonel Packard across the hall, who had quantities of wines and whiskies. He was an old man of seventy, but in his physique and strength, had retained the hard flesh and the endurance of former years. He had told them many risque stories, and paid ardent compliments to Becky, putting his arm about her and calling her his little girl, and asking her where she got fire for hair. And once when the drink on him began to show he drew her aside to tell her that he had some ten millions and that if she would marry him, he would give her half of it. But Becky looked him straight in the eye, and without being harsh of voice she said firmly, "I loved one man, my daddy that is dead, and I shall never marry anyone." The old Silenus was stunned, and only grunted his surprise. He could think of nothing to say. He knew pretty well that gay amours were going

on in Becky's suite across from him, if not between her and Delaher, surely between Minette and Sheridan. And if so why would Becky not marry? Well, there was his age; and yet in his hardened cynicism he believed that any woman could be had for the right amount of money. But not pushing the matter further he put his arm around Becky, called her his little girl again, and joined the others.

After these drinks they returned to Becky's suite and shook up cocktails from the liquor which Bob Hayden had got for them from his friend Edwards. Minette and Sheridan had told Becky about the matter of the check, and the doubt that Bob Hayden seemed to feel touching Sheridan's responsibility. And Becky was furious. She said, "I'll just bawl that old bounder out when he comes again."

And he came this evening, bringing with him Halliwell, as before. They were strolling up town and thought they would call for a moment, and sample the fine Edwards liquor. "I thought I was stung on that," said Bob. "But the check went through . . . the second time. It wasn't good the first."

Becky drew Bob aside to remonstrate with him for his discourtesy to her friend, Mr. Sheridan. But Bob was too much for her. He looked at her with a smile but with his great self assurance and said, "In a case like that a gentleman should not embarrass the embarrasser . . . and do it first."

"You're a peach," shouted Becky slapping her own fat knee by way of sudden energy of spirit. She had begun to wonder about Sheridan, too, and fight shy of his

suggestions that she invest some of her money in his enterprises.

Then every one was gone at last and Minette and Sheridan left to send a telegram, as they said, but, in fact, to go to Sheridan's suite; and Becky and Delaher spent the remainder of the evening alone. The next morning they were all going to Long Island for the week-end, starting about ten o'clock; and Becky had broken her morning slumber to be ready, only to receive a telephone call from Delaher that he was detained by business and couldn't go. Accordingly Minette and Sheridan had gone by themselves, and that left Becky with nothing on her hands, and in very bad mood with Delaher for disappointing her. What business on Saturday could keep him in the city? He had told her that he would telephone her later, and that he hoped to see her in the evening. It occurred to her that it was just the resentment of his lustful nature to fail on this trip; for they were going to a house where there would be no privacy between them. "What beasts men are," thought Becky as she half concluded that Delaher had thrown over the trip in order to come to her this night. And thus the day had passed badly for her. She was nervous and tired to death; for she had been drinking too much, and as for sleep she had not slept eight hours any night since coming from Maine; and for the most part only the hours that remained after two or three o'clock, with nervous tossing when it became day and the noises of the stirring city welling up to her suite from the street below. All the day had passed in sheer nothingness. She couldn't read. Why read any way? She thought today that her mind after all was about equal to Minette's and Sheridan's and Delaher's.

And no one called until Rev. Merrill and Mrs. Merrill came. Where had she read of the loneliness of the coquette, the harlot in the last days, when all the lovers are dead or departed or satiated or estranged? Would such loneliness come to her at last? And then she thought of Kirby: "What have I done to drive a man like that out of my life? . . . and I love him. None of these is worthy to kiss his feet."

Then in the middle of the afternoon the Rev. Merrill and Mrs. Merrill had come for a parting call. They were going to the mountains for the rest of the summer. The year had been very hard for the Rev. Merrill; so much lecturing and preaching and charity work. Becky was terribly bored with him, but she endured it. Otherwise it was loneliness, and again to have a clergyman with her after the debauch of last night and the depressing thoughts of today, and the mysterious conduct of Delaher, seemed to renovate her mood and give her a cleaner hold upon herself. But above all to have Skeeters Kirby come to her! Ah, she had wounded him, and soiled the idealism he had lavished upon her; and she scarcely knew why she had done so, except that her wilfulness had brought her to it, and her profound and serious doubts about the success of a marriage between them had relaxed her fidelity into hours gay and irresponsible, now that she had gone away from Kirby and made up her mind to a permanent separation. And he had come to her in spite of all this! What would their meeting be? What could be made of the broken strands of their love?

Now there was a knock on her door! Her heart thrilled. She hurried to the door and admitted Kirby.

Her face was a bright flame of smiles. Her lips parted

in a quick expression of delight, shot to her cheeks making dimples, and showing her strong teeth. It was one of her odd expressions, unlike anyone else's in the world, and it was infinitely charming to Kirby, as he took her hand and in this brief moment looked into her eyes with a look which she understood.

"I want you to know my friends, Skeet," she said, in the musical tones that were hers when she was gentle. "This is he, Mrs. Merrill and Mr. Merrill, Skeeters Kirby, of whom you have heard me say such wonderful things." She laughed, and giggled girlishly. "Did you ever hear such a name in your life? Skeeters Kirby?"

"A patronyn," suggested Rev. Merrill.

"A patronyn after mosquitoes," laughed Becky. "I fancy when he was a very little boy he was spindly, and long-legged and they gave him that nickname."

"That's it," said Kirby.

There was conversation for a moment; and then the Merrills arose and left. Becky went with them to the door and bowed them out, while Kirby stood at the window looking into the street, wondering what would come to pass, assured somehow that Becky was leading a quiet, if not a very interesting life with associates like the Merrills.

Becky closed the door, and before Kirby could turn around she saw how he was standing at the window, how pensive his manner was, and she said, "Well," and Kirby turned to face her and echoed, "Well," and then they both laughed. Kirby approached her to take her in his arms. But Becky danced away saying, "We mustn't start it again." He could think of nothing better to say than, "Why not?" And she replied, "All quieted now and

good friends, just as I wrote you; and to go through the whole thing again won't do."

Kirby looked at her, doubting her, thinking her a little hypocrite, knowing her passionate nature, and in a sort of rising anger which he concealed and controlled, clear of conviction, that she either loved him and meant to be his again, in marriage or out of it, or else that she had another lover. He had in his pocket the newspaper containing the item about Delaher; and evidently she didn't know yet what had befallen Delaher; or else she knew and it was of no moment to her. The latter he hoped. But he did not wish to bring forth the paper and show it to her. It would raise feelings and words possibly to interfere with what he wished to say to her. Above all he knew her temper and her violence of mind when aroused; and he wanted to guide this visit into channels of understanding, if not happiness.

"Why do you carry a newspaper in your pocket?"

"I forgot," he said, flinging it carelessly into the wastebasket.

"Yes, you forgot to dress, too. You mustn't come to my suite looking like that."

"I am going to get a new suit tomorrow."

"You'd better."

She clicked her tongue contemplatively, and looked at him. She was standing in a position of safety on the other side of the table from him, her hand resting upon it. He started to approach her again, but she waved him off. When she acted this way something hurt him and then enraged him; he felt a physical discomfort and shrinking. Nevertheless he approached her and stood across the table from her, looking at her steadily. He

pushed his hand to hers and touched it, which she permitted. But her gaze was steady and clear, no batting of her eyes even. How self-contained and masterful she was, and yet how below many women he had known in gifts and mind . . . how much below Winifred! "What is the matter, Becky?" he asked.

"Nothing is the matter. I give you the most precious thing that one human being can give to another: My friendship. I am your friend."

"To whom do you give your love?"

"To no one. I have told you a hundred times that I loved my husband, and that I shall never love anyone else."

Kirby took his eyes from hers for the moment; for indeed she had outlooked him; but he wanted to survey the wealth of bouquets which were on the mantel and about the room. She knew what he was thinking, but said nothing and still looked at him.

"I don't understand you. You certainly gave me your love. You told me so . . . you wrote me so. You gave me yourself, sweetly and adorably. I am not conscious of having done anything to lose these riches. If I have, I am sorry, and ask your forgiveness."

"I have never had any resentment against you . . . not against you."

"I understand. But now everything is clear. My devotion to you can no longer embarrass you."

"But I have wounds. Once we stood on the balcony of this hotel, in sweetness of spirit, in the happiness of affectionate children; and yet even that was turned into filth by the circumstances of your life."

"But that is all over."

"Not the wounds. And you were not frank with me. You did not tell me what was happening and the peril I was in. I had to find it out for myself. I am pretty slick, and I found out everything and without any help from you. I stuck by you in a loyalty never surpassed."

"I know you did. But why withdraw it when your loyalty can count for both of us?"

"I haven't. I am your friend."

"Oh, pshaw."

"Don't speak in that tone."

"Don't make it any harder for me. You know what I have suffered and sacrificed for you, Becky."

"I can't stand this. Don't worry me. I am so ill. . . . I am just as ill as I can be. This has almost killed me. My doctor is advising me to be careful. He was here this morning and I am under his care. I haven't had a well day since I came to New York."

"And no fun?"

"Oh! these people that come around me . . . they tire me to death. You know what you can be to me, how you always interest me, how you rest and amuse and delight me when you try, how you never bore me. And if you want to be good we can have a happy time this evening. I'll deny myself to every one; we'll dine here together cosily, and talk. But you mustn't bring up disagreeable things. Just be sweet and happy and say funny things."

Kirby looked at her now to see how pale she was. She had rouged her cheeks delicately; but he could see the pallor through the paint; and her hands trembled when she lifted them to her face, and pressed her eyes with them as if to give them strength and clearness. Sympathy arose in his heart; but at any rate here was the prom-

ise of the evening with her. And what was in her mind after all? She had been his; she would always be his. There is a feeling between a man and a woman who have belonged to each other that neither years nor separation suffice to obliterate. They can come back to each other instantly after years; and the secret is at once their possession again, just as one never forgets how to swim, but confidentially pushes off into the water, no matter how long he has been away from it.

Becky turned into her bedroom, and Kirby followed her to the door, glancing at the twin beds, snowily piled up with their fine linen. "Is some one here with you?" he asked.

"Minette is here with me. She has gone to Long Island for the night and for tomorrow . . . she and Jay."

"Who is Jay?"

"Her friend."

"Isn't she married?"

"Yes, but her husband is away . . . in Europe. But he keeps a mistress, and she knows it, and naturally she does as she pleases."

"I wish you were not here, Becky. I wish you could see the fields and the fresh greens around your place now out there by the river."

"I have no desire to. I am going to Europe pretty soon . . . just to get away from everything."

"From me?"

"Oh, not from you. You wouldn't bother me."

"You can be sure of that. I was in doubt about coming to see you this time. In fact, I walked around the hotel a dozen times trying to decide whether I would enter. Of course I didn't know you were here either."

"Did you do that? Come here and kiss mother."

Kirby hurried to her and took her in his arms. "Kiss mother," she said again. "That's what I used to say to my daddy . . . kiss mother, after we had quarreled or something." Then she gave him a kiss, unique, intimate and thrilling. Kirby pressed her closer to him, sure of her now, his whole being tense with passionate delight. She tore away from him, and stooped down beside the bed to bring forth a bottle of the Edwards whisky. "I'll give you a wonderful bracer. This whisky is fifteen years old. And do you know who got it for me?"

"I haven't an idea."

"Your friend, Bob Hayden."

"How did you get acquainted with him?"

"He came with my publisher one night. He was here last night . . . both of them, in fact. I'm going to publish five books, Skeet, and I got three thousand dollars in advance royalties, and I want to ask you what to do with it."

"Give it to the poor."

"I'll do nothing of the sort. I'm going to spend it for trees and a lot of things on the lot about the tomb of my daddy; and if there's anything left I'll found a ward in a hospital in his name."

"That will be good."

She opened the bottle and they drank. In a few minutes they were on the couch together. He sat at the end and she reclined her head and shoulders in his arms, which were folded above her breast. His face was over hers and now that her eyes were closed he studied it: how sealed was her face, as if a great lotus petal had been waxed to it, the eyes how wistful and foxlike under these

closed lids, and the eyebrows plucked or naturally scant, how interrogative and capricious and impish! A sort of detached and steadily burning wannishness too, like a light that is at a distance in a dim air, was the unified impression of the whole countenance! And the lips how rich but sweet, not voluptuous, yet opulent, and exquisitely bowed. He was kissing her again and again, cool, delicate kisses, reverently passionate kisses but of light contact, to which she responded with the most restrained movement of her lips, which lisped as he drew his lips from hers, till at last he took his face away from hers for breath. He began to talk to her now. "Dear," he said, "Come back home. Come back and be with me; let us be together in that place where we have had such happiness. Are you going to drift and waste and be lost, perhaps, like a lily that has been torn from its place and goes down the stream and out to the deep water?"

She did not answer him. And he began to think over their first days together there on the Rock River: how she had spied him from the rim of the hill, lying with her head upon her arms like a cherub and watching him, as he lay on the slope and looked into the sky, grieving for Winifred, and wondering what was to be the end of his quarrel with Alicia, his wife; and how he had seen Becky, and had run up the hill, finding her girlish and radiant, and full of elfin gaieties, and dancing away from him as he pursued her, almost bewitched with her wonder! Was this sealed face, this limp body the same being of that day? And what had come over her that she no longer seemed like the shining spirit who had read Plato with him in the long evenings at her home on the river; who had made her will for his benefit; who had told him to give Alicia

all he had and to come and share with her what she had; who had walked with him and prayed with him and asked to be entombed with him in that tomb which she had built for her husband; and who had stretched her hands to him, saying, "I dare not let myself go," and who had come to him at night and in his arms had whispered, "I want you for mine, my husband."

He could scarcely keep back the tears as he thought of the way she used to welcome him: once when he had come out of the rain, cold and dampened through, she had gone for dry clothing, for the robe which she had bought for him and kept in the room, which was called his, and poured brandy for him from the golden bottle which stood on the little table in the library. What had become of that woman? Was it she who lying now in his arms in these rooms of the Ritzdorf, in the closeness of their devitalized summer air, amid the noise of the street below, in the association of people like the Merrills and who could know what others, fatigued by daily excitements and by nightly dinners and amorous engagements? What was the delight of all this, and why exchange green fields and freedom, and health, and love, too, for such things as these?

Again he said: "Come back home, dear. Why did you go away? Why do you stay away? Why did you write me that letter? If there is some one you love, if you do not love me, only let me know and I shall leave you. I shall not follow you. That will end it all."

She made no reply. She was hoping that Kirby would take her now. It violated her æsthetic to have such a thing happen, because she was too recently from the arms of Delaher; but if she had no part in it, nature was

hearty and would overcome sensitive imaginings. But on his part, remembering how willingly she had been his, how easily and ardently she had first come to him, nothing short of a repetition of the old dedication would do. He must know that she was wholly his again; and that if in this separation some one else had held her thus, or won her beauty, all of it must be erased by new fire, clear and pure and burning for him alone.

The late afternoon sun was lying on the wall of a great building across the street, for it was nearly seven o'clock. And while they were sitting thus there was a knock on the door, and Becky jumped out of his arms, and standing near the center table called "Yes."

In a moment a waiter entered to take her order for dinner. "Does madam wish to be served?" he asked.

"Yes. What shall we have, Skeet? Let's have some fish, it's too hot for meat. And a salad and some asparagus . . . and a bottle of wine. Some of that same champagne, Tony."

"Yes, madam."

"And some strawberries and cream. Does that suit you, Skeet?" Excuse me for going right ahead."

"It couldn't be better."

"Very well, madam," and the waiter left.

"I shall not dress for dinner, in dishonor of you. You are not dressed."

"I hope you will pardon me, darling. The ride was long and hot and I came right to you; and the truth is I couldn't look much better, anyway, until I go and get me something to wear. But may I freshen my hands and face a little?"

"Oh, yes indeed."

And Kirby went through Becky's bedroom to the bath, seeing on the way her silver slippers peeking from the edge of the counterpane, and the picture of Becky's husband on her dressing table. Always this picture!

Meanwhile, Becky, struggling with mixed emotions, wondering about Delaher and feeling now with Kirby thus freshly in evidence before her how thin and empty was the personality of Delaher, was half loathing herself for admitting Delaher to her favor, since she had done it only in capitulation to his physical beauty and magnetism. Oh! this vile sex business which led one into a violation of truth all the time . . . and for what at last? She felt soiled and weary, and as she did that May when she had left Kirby to come to New York, left him amid the fields around the river, and had been taken by Delaher, at the very time when Kirby's love, his idealization of her, seemed to promise the solution of her passional and spiritual nature. Then she had written Kirby after a silence which almost wrenched the heart from his breast: "I loathe myself. I lust for death. I want to leap from this window and end it all."

Kirby re-entered the room with a brisk walk, his face rosy and smiling, and cleared of its shadows. He went to Becky, who was sitting pensively on a large upholstered chair and kissed her gently on the brow, then passionately on the lips. She closed her eyes, and as he stood away she leaned her head against the back of the chair with an air of great weariness, allowing her arms to fall listlessly and hang to the floor. She looked the picture of exhaustion; and Kirby studied her a moment; then he said, "I believe I'll telephone Bob Hayden to let him know I'm here."

"Not here!"

"I don't mean in this room with you, Becky. But here in New York."

Becky made no reply, and Kirby called Murray Mitchell's apartment only to get no response. For this afternoon Mitchell had persuaded Hayden to leave the apartment, where he had been staying day after day, scarcely going out at all, to attend the ball game, and afterwards to dine at a restaurant on Broadway, near the theatre district. Well, Kirby thought it was just as well that he did not find Bob at home, for if he had he might have been drawn into an engagement with Bob for tomorrow, and as things stood he would wish to spend the day with Becky, and he could assuredly do so.

Becky became livelier with the dinner and after the wine; and as Kirby renewed the old theme of her returning to her home in order to be with him, and to go on with the life which they had begun there so charmingly, she entered into a discussion of the phases of this course with more reasonableness of mind. All this, of course, pointed to a marriage between her and Kirby; but even this she was now discussing calmly and with appreciation of the factors involved. But she had said at first: "You are terribly selfish, Skeet, terribly so. As I told you before, you can't imprison me, even if we were married. My daddy never tried to. When he was living I used to go to him and get two thousand dollars or so and come down here to New York and stay, and he never questioned it. He always said 'have a good time, mother,' and he used to write me the sweetest letters, one a day."

Kirby was thinking that it was no wonder that she ran away from an impotent husband; and just now he

remembered what she had told him once about her frantic state of mind when she was in New York, on one of her many trips while her husband was living: how she was in her room and began to think of a man whom she had met, and suddenly took a cab, went to his office, rushed in upon him giving him a violent kiss, and then rushed away; and, as she said, refused to receive him when he telephoned and tried to call upon her. If this was her mood, then, and if she had not altered in respect to the desire that she had manifested for Kirby in the fond days by the river, why this abstention from him, why the letter of farewell written from Maine, and why these annoying protestations of friendship to him now? Was there some one else? He thought he would now very adroitly push the conversation to a disclosure from Becky as to what was in her mind and heart.

"You know I'd never interfere with you as to your life," he said at last.

"Oh, yes, you would and you have. You did when I came down here that time, and when I told you that I was going to see the 'satchel' man and tell him that I had met a real man, meaning you. . . ."

"You think I'm a real man, do you, Becky?"

"Sometimes. . ."

"Sometimes?"

"Yes, when you don't lament about my being away. For I am just as likely as not to be in India tomorrow; in fact, Constance wants me to go with her, and I have been considering it. And another thing if it wasn't for this rotten sex matter, you would be contented to have me in India or Zanzibar; for I can give you all the finest things in life through letters. . ."

"Only you never do. Your letters are so inverted and vice versa, and sprinkled with words that have no meaning in the use you make of them, and so concealing of your relation to me and all your feelings, that I get nothing of you from them."

"Oh, very well, then I shan't write any more."

"I want you to write, but if we are to have as good things by writing as we do when together, then you will have to change your manner."

"Well, I won't. No one is ever going to be able to read my heart from my letters. What I have given to you, I have given, and no hyenas are going to feast on it."

"Nor do I feast on it. It comes to the matter of your being as much to me when away as when with me; and plainly you are not."

"Oh, well, you understand. One can tell what a letter means without having love written all over it. I hate that messy stuff. And if I should be fool enough to write such things, and they got out and were printed I should take poison."

"Very well, why not write me about what you have been reading and thinking, about the people you meet, about the thoughts on life that come to you? . . ."

"I don't want to. I am too tired."

"That's just it. But you are not too tired to talk them to me when we are together. . . ."

She was silent and he was thinking that since their first spring together that for the most part she had been too tired or too ill to talk serious things with him or to give him much beside her passional nature. An ugly thought entered his mind: she was more beautiful, per-

haps, than the woman the detective Megary had married, and more exquisite and better bred, but after all what had she more to give? And had he been completely fooled by that first spring in which he fancied that at last he had met a woman who would inspire him and share with him his intellectual interests, and go along with him in life in a path of mutual growth? He remembered what his father had said to him long ago when he was engaged to Martha Fisk, the little anæmic heiress, but when he was really more drawn to and involved with Alicia Adams, that all women were alike, indispensable, but fundamentally a burden and a waste to a man.

"There is another thing Skeet: Suppose we were married and I made up my mind to go to Italy to live for a year; or to go to India what would you do?"

"I couldn't help it, I suppose."

"No you couldn't. But suppose I wanted you along, as I should, what would you do?"

"I'd go."

She looked at him now, not wishing to wound him on this matter, and sensing ahead that she was partly responsible for his financial condition, which would make his going with her an impossibility.

"I know what you mean. You mean that I haven't the money."

"Have you?"

"Not just now." He was thinking that perhaps his investment with Megary might prove fortunate as that investment had long ago in which he made $80,000.

"Not just now," she repeated after him.

She could echo this and look at him, and she knew that he had parted with his fortune to protect her name.

After all, other women had gone through the courts, and had been newspapered, why hadn't he let her? Why had he been governed by such considerations of chivalry . . . if they were not to be appreciated? His heart was hurt by Becky's tone and words.

"We have been children, Skeet . . . just children," she went on. "You wouldn't want me to finance you, and take you with me. You wouldn't want to live a hotel life, a traveling life. You are burning up with ambition and energy. You couldn't be idle, and if you were you would rot. And I know what I am saying: my hair is wound around the gates of hell, as yours is, and they would tangle and pull the gates over on us and crush us. The doctors say I am ill; I am neurotic, and I believe I am."

What had become of Becky's love which had inspired her to say, "Give what you have to Alicia, and come and share with me what I have." And now Becky's possible desire to go to Italy stood as a bar to their marriage, because he could not pay his own expenses on such a trip. . .

"You are not neurotic. You had a wonderful girlhood of open air life and work; and you are really as strong as a woman can be. But this life! Why it would kill anyone. You don't get air, you don't get exercise, and you naturally brood and waste in this artificial environment. No wonder you are ill. And there are the fields and the woods that beckon to you; and here am I who could help you and sustain you, husband you, and make your life one of meaning. You should have a child, and accomplish your course as a woman."

"But I won't."

"Very well, you won't. Then where do you end up? What is life to be? What does it mean?"

"It means nothing."

"Nothing is nothing."

"I shall end up with my daddy there in the tomb with him."

" 'And we are born in other's pain and perish in our own,' " Kirby said.

The wine had stimulated Becky, but its reaction had set in. She was leaning back in a large chair now, her eyes closed, her body limp, overcome by great fatigue. As she looked now, Kirby did not admire her, he did not want her, she was a contradiction to his vital conception of life, a life of activity, outdoors, exercise, work, normal indulgences, study, interesting friends. He had always hoped to have many acres near a city, and to raise cattle and horses, and to have dogs and bees, and an orchard, and a great house with many books. Becky had seemed at first the right mistress for such a place; but she looked alien to all this now, here in this stuffed room of the Ritzdorf, this hostelry for rich people from the country, this memorial pile of gay nights and days for the good livers and epicures of an earlier day, who still came to it to live over its ancient and unparalleled splendor, and their own youthful dissipations. Her sophistication consisted in other things than in the choice of this hotel; for that rather bespoke her reaching for a distinction in living which allured those who didn't quite know the best, or didn't fancy it. It was as expensive as any hotel; and perhaps this was enough distinction for Becky. And Kirby thought all these things and wondered if his demon had not guided him, against his

own passionate will and hope, from the arms of this woman in marriage. Had she not given him everything she could, thrilling whispers in the darkness, and kisses and her breast for his head, and having given these had nothing more to give: no mind that would grow, no nature that would enrich his? And yet the vision of what she had been that first spring, and afterward, stayed in his mind and renewed a hope that would not surrender, and stirred a desire that begged not to be stifled.

The telephone bell rang, and Becky started, and stared with misty, half reddened eyes. "I'll not answer it," she said energetically. It rang again, and then again and again. "I can't imagine who it can be . . . at this hour. What time is it, Skeet?"

"Twenty minutes after eleven."

"You must go."

He went to her, picked her up, and carried her into the bedroom, laying her upon the bed. She was heavy, her flesh was soft and she was strengthless; but she made no struggle. He lay down beside her and took her in his arms. "You mustn't do this," she said feebly. "The maid will be coming to turn down the beds." "They are already turned down. The maid was here an hour ago. I heard her." Becky was silent. And then as the telephone began to ring again, she jumped quickly from the bed and went to the parlor, followed by Kirby, who begged her not to answer it. Still the bell rang. "Some one may be ill, Henrietta, my friend. Or something may have happened to Jay or Minette."

"It may simply be some one down stairs."

"Not at this hour . . . not that." And the bell kept

ringing. Becky walked to the desk and took up the receiver.

"Yes," she said. "No. What about? What newspaper? I haven't seen the evening paper. Not tonight, you can't. I am just retiring . . . it is too late. I don't understand. But what can I do? That depends. I'll understand you if there is anything to understand. But as I don't know what this is, I can't speak now. You may come for luncheon. In the afternoon I am going out. In the evening I have guests. Don't say that to me over the telephone. You know that Jay is your friend and Minette and all of us. . . Yes and I am. . . Good-by."

She hung up the receiver and turned to Kirby visibly nervous.

"What's the matter Becky?"

"A friend of mine is in some kind of trouble."

"Man or woman?"

"A man."

"I bet I know who it is."

Becky looked at him wonderingly and asked quickly, "Who?"

"Julius Delaher, 'the satchel man.' "

"How did you know?"

"I saw it in the evening paper."

"And you never mentioned it to me all this evening!"

"No, I didn't."

"Becky rushed to the waste basket, and fished out the evening paper that Kirby had thrown into it. Then she read with rapid and devouring eyes. She let the paper fall and walked weakly to a chair and sank into it.

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Yes, he is a friend of mine . . . and I never desert a friend. He may need money, or he may need merely advice and sympathy."

"But while he is under this cloud do you think you should let him come to your room?"

"I think just that. I never desert a friend."

"Is he so much your friend?"

"Every one is so much my friend. Do you suppose I would turn you away if you were in trouble?"

"No, but . . ."

"You are my friend and I am yours, and he is, and I would do for you what I shall do for him."

"What?"

"Whatever I can to help him."

"Which will be nothing, unless it be to give him money; for he is mixed up with some woman, and a man in that fix is like a man with some disease. People may be sorry but they can't do much, and many simply have to keep away."

She was staring into vacancy; and Kirby could see that she was in distress of mind. What should he do with her? Surely there was something between Becky and this man. Should he not treat her as a mutual possession, and kill any serious feeling that he had for her? After a time she spoke up: "And you knew this all evening, and didn't say a word?"

"Well, I knew it, but it didn't impress me much and I forgot it."

"I don't believe you."

"Quite true just the same."

"You must go. I am tired to death."

"Shall I see you tomorrow?"

"In the evening."

When she was talking to Delaher she had in mind spending the next evening with Kirby, and hence her remark to Delaher that she would be engaged, and that he could come for luncheon. And now though she was furious with Kirby for not mentioning the matter of the newspaper item, and considered his failure to do so as a kind of subtle trick, in keeping with a certain cunning of his which she had always sensed in his thinking and acting, she held her wrath, and did not change her plan to receive him tomorrow evening. Limply she held her hand to him for the good night salutation. He took her in his arms and kissed her good night, descended to the lobby and telephoned Hayden, who happened to be up and talking to Mitchell before retiring. Hayden turned to Mitchell and told him who it was. "Have him come up here and stay. Plenty of room; and it will be fun to have him." So Hayden extended the invitation; and Kirby went to his hotel, got his grip and took a taxi for Murray Mitchell's apartment, receiving from Bob Hayden a hearty laugh of welcome, and from Mitchell also. They had a midnight supper and retired.

CHAPTER IX

The next morning was intensely hot. The men did not get up until about eleven o'clock; and as Kirby looked out into Central Park, shimmering under the fierce rays of the sun, he thought of Becky in those close rooms in the Ritzdorf, and wondered if she were not stifled. It was cooler here at this elevation of eight stories and with this frontage to the north. Here Bob Hayden had been staying some days, walking the floor all day long in his night dress and reflecting upon the complications of his life. He had troubles enough and he was not in very robust health, but he concealed his sufferings under a show of gay spirits and lively talk. He came to the breakfast table this morning in his night dress, for Murray Mitchell had a Japanese butler, and no freedom was prohibited.

Bob began to study Kirby. He knew that Kirby had something on his mind, and that that something was a woman. He had been through this experience over and over again, and he knew how to sympathize with a man of Kirby's age and sensitive disposition. He meant to befriend him, and one way to do it was to let Kirby talk himself out; then he might advise him, if he could. At the breakfast table, however, Bob rose above his own depression of spirits by sheer will; and launched himself into all sorts of raillery and mirth, and self-mockery, and

gentle irony directed against the human species and against life itself. These mornings his head ached, his body ached, he felt languid, and without energy; and spiritually he was without hope. He had done the best he had known how with his own life, in spite of many mistakes, and much waste of time. But he was wise enough to know that he could not have made better use of it, that is, to any ultimate success; for his philosophy told him that there is no such thing. Every one fails. There is no goal, no path, no wisdom. And yet he was enraptured of life, and believed that it had a meaning that men never comprehend, though all the while living and expressing it in the general scheme of seventy years. And if a soul learns all that it can from books and life, from error and suffering, what better consummation can it have? In addition to his physical ills he had financial embarrassment, and he was alone in the world from the deaths of old chums, and the dispersion and the taking away of father and mother and brothers and sisters. He was thinking that the hour of death was not far away from him. And so it was that he walked the floor for the whole day here in the apartment of his friend, and denied himself to many in New York who would have been glad to have him with them, and to listen to the ripeness of his wisdom and the subtlety of his wit.

But at this moment with the coffee on the table and the fruit and the eggs, and the bright sun shining without and the whirl of the city's life floating up to the windows, and above all with the youthful and handsome face of Kirby before him, a little troubled in its expression, but good-humored, too, Hayden grew very gay and talkative. The conversation was of books, and publishers; of

Byron's poetry, and Browning's; of Cæsar and Washington, and Cleveland; of Bryan, his restless activity, his shallowness of mind, and growing hardness and malice, and his resemblance spiritually to the Brand of Ibsen. There were references to Wilson, who was then a new name, and Hayden was prophesying that Wilson would be the next nominee of the Democratic Party for President. There was also talk of Shakespeare, and comparisons made between him and Goethe; and references to Voltaire whom Kirby characterized as a God drunk man. Mitchell was mostly quiet during these exchanges—yet though he was preparing to play golf this morning, he was lingering at the breakfast table, just because he was fascinated with the sallies of his friend Hayden as they were stimulated by the youthful Kirby, upon whom Hayden was looking with such evident delight.

"Say, you fellows," interrupted Mitchell at last, "what do you think of golf?"

"A noble outdoor sport for leading seniles, and gents trying to keep from becoming so."

"Be that as it may," said Mitchell, "I am going out to the links, and I won't be back till night. If you want to come out and have dinner with me you're welcome. So long." And Mitchell left Bob and Kirby sitting at the breakfast table, and went his way.

"Let's move into the front room, it's cooler there and there are better chairs. And it's now sex o'clock."

"In China."

"In America, and everywhere. I said sex o'clock."

"Oh! Well, maybe you don't want me to talk to you."

"I do. You are about 33, Skeet, and I am pretty near

50, and I have, like Macbeth and others, drunk deep at the cup. And if I can help you I want to do it."

"Somehow I fancy you know a good deal already."

"A good deal. George told me that you had given up the most of your fortune to save a woman's name . . . he didn't say who. But I guessed it to be the Becky Norris, who has the fine place behind the poplars near your cabin. And then your letter to me before you went out there, and just a general piecing together. Seeing her here in New York gave me a kind of clew. Now you go ahead and talk yourself out. It will do you good; and I'll listen, and tell you what to do if I can."

"You think I need advice?"

"You wear a most troubled and pained look, Skeeters, and you need something. I think you need a woman, more than you need the widow as a particular medium."

"You knew Winifred Hervey didn't you?"

"Yes, and a most wonderful and lovely creature she was."

"I believe everything would have been different with me if she had lived."

"No, that's just your dream, Skeet, none of them can do anything for you."

"I was reading the other day what Tennyson said about his marriage. He said the peace of God came in his heart when he stood before the altar with the woman he married."

"Well, if you trust Tennyson's poetry as a true report of life you might trust his words on that. But did he say that when he just came from the altar, or during the honeymoon, or in his dotage, or when? I'd want to know. The peace of God! In this world so full of

cruelty, which almost seems to have cruelty as its inspiring principle, and the cruelty of men toward each other, and men and women toward each other as the subtlest malice of all in the great devouring which is life! Nope! But you go ahead, first letting me ask you a few questions to see what you know about the lady from my standpoint. Did you know she had freckles?"

"No."

"Did you know she had a rabbit nose?"

"No."

"Did you know she dyed and blondined her hair?"

"No."

"Did you know she's about thirty-eight years old?"

"No."

"Well, I'll bet you don't know any more about the nature of the widow. You're bemused, Skeet, in the great haze of passion, and wounded passion at that. So go on now with your story, and then I'll tell you some things that may be good for you."

"Well, in the first place I got into great rebellion on account of Alicia. I considered that she had cheated me when she married me having had herself sterilized; and so on account of my troubles with her and a general resentment toward life, I broke away from Chicago and went to George Higgins' cabin there by the Rock River. I hadn't been there but a few days when I met Alicia strolling through the woods with her old friend Ethel Landon. I didn't think of it then, but I see now that she had come there to spy on me, in the prosecution of a long-headed campaign for money."

"Trust any of them for that."

"You know already about my first meeting with

Becky, at least I told it to George. I thought the fated thing of my life had come, that she with a woman's intuition had chosen me. . . ."

"She had, for her own uses."

"Anyway, I spent that afternoon with her by the tree and so forth, and in a few days I went to her house. That was the second time I saw her . . . and she came to me as naturally as I would pick a flower. I had gone to her little library, and she was dancing ahead of me. No sooner did we enter than she closed the door and turned the lock. She put her strong arms around me at the hips and crushed me to her convulsively. Then we talked. She showed me the picture of her dead husband. . . ."

"Yes."

"And her books, some of which were my favorites and were new. There were many photographs on the wall. And even before dinner she had told me the names of all of them, and who and what they were, and how they had come into her life. They were the photographs of elderly men, of young boys, of elderly women, of women much older than she; there were only a few of men of her age, of romantic quality. Of the elderly men, she said they were friends she had met here and there, learned or interesting characters. The women were her devoted friends; the boys were the sons of these women friends, still young, but older than Becky. The young men were just friends. There were a few women her own age. Of these she told me of misfortunes to her relations with them; how they had wronged her, how she had forgiven them, without re-establishing them in their old niches of her regard. She told me that that was her nature;

if she once changed toward anyone, that person was catalogued as changed in her life; and nothing could effect a restoration to the old place of esteem.

"It was now dark in the room; she walked from the window and tried the key in the door. Then came back closer to me, her finger upon her lip reflectively. I walked to the couch and sat down. She approached me, and I flung my arms around her, and brought her to me, resistless and weak. . .

"She rose and left the room quietly, leaving me lying upon the couch drunk with beauty."

"Drunk with beauty . . . Yes," and Hayden laughed.

"Oh, we had had some wine, but I was sober. Well then that evening we talked. She told me about her girlhood, her marriage, and went on to tell me how good a girl she was before she married. Then she pointed to a photograph of a handsome fellow on the wall and began to tell me the story about him. She said that after her husband had been an invalid for five years she went to New York for a rest, and that she met this young man on that trip. He was young, and beautiful in youth and strength, and he fell in love with me. Becky went out of the room, returning with a package. It was the typed copies of this man's letters, which Becky told me she had returned. 'All these letters to me. You can read them!' 'No,' I said, 'I do not wish to.' 'Well,' Becky resumed, 'we wrote to each other! And finally Mr. Norris had to be taken to a hospital for a time, and while he was there my friend was coming from New York to see me. I got ready for him—had everything planned for his comfort, his delight. I dressed in this very dress, put on these very pearls, sat here just as I am now and

waited. But he didn't come. Not even a telegram. But in a few days a letter came saying that he had got as far as his door with a suitcase packed, being carried by his valet, when a business matter came up which prevented his coming.'

" 'Nonsense,' I cried in a burst of chivalry. 'I loathe him—I loathe that man—let's call him the satchel man.'

" 'Well,' said Becky with the girlish giggle and chuckle again, 'you can be sure I intend to face him some time and tell him I have met a man—a real man. But, oh, it was all so fortunate. I am so glad—so glad—that not even in my most trying extremity, even then, I did not dishonor my husband. It was the work of God that I didn't; and so when he died I could look into his face and say, daddy, I have always kept my word—always. Skeet, I am talking to you as if you were my mother or my God,' she said at last.

" 'I have been alone so much,' she went on. 'Mr. Norris has now been gone three years. We had about two years' of married life; then five years in which I cared for him —and then my loneliness. Tomorrow we will walk across the field to the cemetery where I built a tomb for him. I want you to see it. And do you know these women who seemed so devoted to me, they did not really stand by me when I lost my daddy. What do you suppose? Evelyn comes on from Philadelphia to the funeral—and while she is here she's just horrid, so selfish, and says such little poisonous things, with my daddy lying dead here in the house. And Marjorie is in league with her. I'm just the same to them as ever. But I'm changed toward them. There are their pictures on the wall—but they're catalogued in my heart. I have never had a fair

deal from anyone except my daddy; and if I had dishonored him after all he did for me I'd deserve a thousand times the whippings that my brutal father gave me when I was fourteen—'

" 'Becky,' I said, 'this matter of your friends wronging you sounds like an obsession. Surely they didn't mean anything. Don't be bitter!'

" 'Yes, I'm not bitter,' she went on. 'I'm just changed. I can't be what I was. After all I've done for Evelyn and Marjorie—all I have given them, all the access they have had to these riches which my daddy surrounded me with and left to me—to allow their lesser natures to sway them in such a time—I can't forgive it.'

" 'Have these two had romances?'

" 'No, but their husbands are frightfully jealous.'

" 'Who is this pretty woman?' I asked, pointing to a photograph.

" 'Well, she *had* a romance, one of the strangest.'

" 'Married?'

" 'Yes,—very much so.'

" 'Where have you known all of these people?'

" 'Here and there.'

" 'You are their confidante?'

" 'Yes, they tell me everything. And they have been saying to me all these years—even before my daddy died—"Why don't you have a romance, Becky?" And I'd always say: "How can it be? How do you plan it? How do you overcome the difficulties?" And here you have taught me, Skeet! Who are you, anyway?' "

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Bob Hayden. " 'And here you have taught me.' Well, go on Skeet."

"I feel like a scoundrel telling you all this."

"You don't need to. You can be sure Becky has told some one. The women don't keep their secrets, when they are proud of the man. And besides Becky's servants knew the situation."

"They must have known it. And so it went. She arose, went to another door of the room and unlocked it, and I saw into a bath of onyx and tile. She said to me 'this is your room,' and I went in, and after a while I became conscious of Becky standing in the middle of the room—she had stolen in like a shadow of gossamer silk, and I arose and went to her and took her in my arms. The next day I was off to New York about that book. But when I awoke I was alone. I arose and went to the bath, and found the door to the little library locked from the other side. I tried it softly. I rapped gently. There was no response. I bathed and dressed. I went from my chamber into the hall, finding the door locked from my side; but I hadn't locked it. The door from the hall into the library was open. I walked in and looked about, waiting for Becky. Should I see her again before going? What was next? I waited but heard no sound. I read out of different books. I looked through the bookcases. Spying Schopenhauer's 'The World as Will and Idea,' I took it out of the case. Becky's name was written in three volumes—but the pages were uncut; entirely so of the first and second volumes. Of the first volume only the leaves of the introduction were cut.

"A lock clicked. It was of the door leading from the library to Becky's chamber. I turned around. There was Becky, radiant, fresh, glowing, her eyes great spheres

of light, all in all a presence of flame. 'I've been looking at your Schopenhauer,' I said.

" 'That's a new copy,' said Becky. 'I gave the one I read to Evelyn.'

" 'She must have a mind to understand it.'

"Becky made no reply. I had an instant of skepticism. Had Becky read Schopenhauer? Had she read more than the introduction as far as the leaves were cut in the first volume? No matter. The mood changed. Becky was smiling, showing her dimples. And we breakfasted.

"Then she cried at parting and I went my way to New York, and saw Evelyn, her friend there, who rather threw suspicion into me about Becky's philosophical accomplishments, and I went through a certain hell for not hearing from Becky, and finally heard from her, and hurried back to Chicago to urge George Higgins to rush my divorce, offering Alicia a large alimony to close it quickly. I'll tell you about the return visit with Becky, and then pass on, for I don't want to bore you."

"Bore me," laughed Bob, "this is better than a circus . . . and I don't mean that unkindly. I just mean it's the same as if you were telling me about a case of the measles, which has just the same symptoms with every one, and furnishes certain interesting phases of delirium or talk, according to the nature of the individual. And so, go on . . . and more power to your arm."

"Well," resumed Kirby, "I came back and found Becky in a tangle of perplexities about her business, and I helped her. The afternoon was soon gone. We had often planned to go to her husband's tomb."

"Yes, excuse me for laughing, Skeet."

"Laugh as much as you please. If you think I am a damn fool just say so. 'We can't go to the tomb now,' said Becky, looking out of the window at the Zeppelin clouds, purple, slate-colored, sailing over the distant hills, 'It is growing dark. See! leaves are falling. It will soon be winter now. I have stayed here so much alone—and in winter time it is dreary enough. The wind whistles about the eves; the fire flaps down and puffs out like a witch's skirt; the snow pelts these panes. But I do not know where to go this winter!'

" 'Stay here, Becky, please. If you go away I'll follow you.'

" 'You mustn't. It would make talk.'

" 'Stay here, then. I'll have Henry bank my house, stuff the window casings; and I'll stay here. We can study; we can be infinitely happy. We can——' I arose and took Becky in my arms. 'Oh, my dear. It will be spring after a while, then I shall say: "Shine out little head, running over with curls, to the flowers and be their sun." Do stay for the spring. Be here with me in the spring.'

"Becky embraced me passionately. 'Kiss me, Skeet,' she said in a voice so tender that the moment made me wish for death for both of us, that we might pass from this infinite bliss together to eternal forgetfulness.

"It grew heavy dusk in the room. We sat by the crepuscular ashes in the fireplace. 'More wood,' said Becky, and she left the room. 'Let me get it,' said I. 'No.' She was gone; I followed. She came out of a closet, tugging with heavy chunks; and even then she would only let me relieve her of part of them. The fire, being fed, blazed up; the room was fluttering with the

light of the flames on the wall and the ceiling when Nora entered with dinner. The lights were turned on. Our moods brightened. For we had wine, and our spirits began to dance.

"Well, then, George Higgins came out. But before that something happened which has an important bearing. To make a long story short I was followed and didn't know it. Every time I left her house at night I was followed. One night I thought I saw a man standing near my cabin, after having been passed by a man when I left Becky's house. I got my shotgun and went to the door, but the man disappeared. And later when Becky and I went to the tomb, we were followed. As we stopped in a little swale to kiss each other, we were seen; and when we got to the tomb, there was a man standing there; and Becky thought it was one of the workmen in the cemetery; but it was a detective, and all these things came to the knowledge of George Higgins, my lawyer, through Cavette Errant, Alicia's lawyer. But I was going it blind all the time, and so was Becky. . . As I said, George came out, and Becky and I planned to fool George. We arranged it so that she would be in the grocery store of the village when George got off the train. And she was, and I took George over there on my errand to pick up groceries. George knew her by sight and had the nerve, as we hoped, to bow to her, thus we all got acquainted, and we thought we had George fooled as to our previous acquaintance with each other . . . but I don't know. All of this was before the detective reports had come to George through Cavette Errant. Well, Becky had George and me to dinner and they didn't get along. Becky was saying that a friend

of hers, Christie Ferris, had sold 40,000 copies of a book she had written, and that she, Becky, had sold 4,000 copies of her own book. And then something came up about two men friends of hers, and George despised these fellows. They were both musicians and there were ugly whispers about them; and when we got back to the cabin, he pitched into these fellows for she had said to George that they had been her guests; and he went so far as to say that he wouldn't touch the woman with tongs because she had harbored them, and he wouldn't go back to Becky's again."

"Did his opinion of Becky affect you any?"

"No, it didn't, for I thought she got the best of him in a literary argument. And so far as these men were concerned, I know The Symposium, and think I understand the psychology of such things and while they affect me with loathing, I suppose if I knew a man of that kind, who was interesting, I could go along with him well enough."

"Yes, but, as a matter of æsthetics, or of Becky's innocence, and her dedication to you, virginal dedication as she led you to believe, what did you think when you knew that she entertained men of this sort?"

"I was grieved, but put it out of mind. For Becky was very emphatic in her arguments when talking against my surprised attitude and my gentle disapproval. She said that she believed in every one taking life as he chose to. Well, then Constance came to visit Becky, an old woman, and she went away with Constance. And then I went away, and I had the agony of separation, and I was mystified by Becky. Her letters amounted to nothing, and I had all the poisoned honey of love, and a thou-

sand things to keep me guessing. She came back, and we were together again in all happiness; and I was followed as before, and didn't know it; and when I stayed all night at Becky's, which was often, this detective stood out side all night, or until he saw the lights put out. Then finally she got ready to go to New York, and then it was that I asked her to engage herself to me.

"She left the room quickly, returning with her wonderful ruby ring, and a pin containing many diamonds. 'Take this, Skeet; have the ruby reset with these diamonds,' she said. 'Have designs drawn and send them to me. I will select a design. I want the diamonds grouped around the ruby so as to give it a heart shape, very delicate, not obvious—but you and I will understand. And I shall wear the ring—and that will be our engagement ring. Now, are you willing to let me go?' "

" 'Yes,' I said, my heart beating in my throat, my breath growing short. 'Yes, Becky.' I stepped toward Becky and put limp arms about her neck. She kissed me over and over on the brow, the cheeks, the lips. But she was calm, not a tear; all her face aglow from the world of New York, the days ahead.

" 'Are you going to see the "satchel man" in New York?'

" 'Yes,' said Becky, with a vigorous snap to her voice.

" 'And I am going to tell him all about you—everything.' "

"Her words were the crack of a whip in my face. I could think dumbly, feebly, that if she said this, the man, if he were a man, if there was opportunity, and there must be for her to use such words, that the man would seize her in answer to such a taunt. He would lay hands upon my Becky. And why not, if goaded by

such a challenge as this? I could think these things, but I could not say them. I said, instead: 'You will tell me everything about your meeting?'

" 'You can be sure of that,' said Becky.

" 'Then all I have to say is that you can hurt me unspeakably. You can make my heart gush blood; but I can understand everything—and I can forgive.'

"And so Becky left, and I went into Chicago to see George Higgins about my divorce. Before that I went to the jeweler's and left the spiral ruby and the diamonds and ordered the ring according to the design which Becky wanted.

"A telegram came next day, announcing Becky's arrival. It read:

" 'Train did not get off the track!'

"And in two days I had a letter. It ended with the words, 'I send you so much.' And other letters came, concluding, 'affectionately,' but never any signature. Oh, well, what more could I ask? Becky could not write me freely. I was not a free man. Perhaps Becky thought there might be peril in the circumstance of my undissolved ties. Finally I sent on the designs for the ring. Becky didn't like them. They were not delicate enough. I ordered other drawings made. And in the midst of this I had a startling interview with George.

"I was staying with George at the apartment. One day I was to telephone him at noon to get his final word as to whether he could take the afternoon off to see a new exhibition of pictures at the Art Institute. I did call him and he said: 'Well, maybe we can go. But you'd better come here for a while. I've something important to tell you.'

"I went to George's office at once. He looked at me with big eyes. He smiled. He acted as if he had a precious secret. He got up and closed the door of his private office. Then with a side glance, and ironical eyes, he sat down, put his hands back of his head, opened his mouth and laughed. 'What's the matter?' I asked. 'Well, Skeet, how's the widow? Ha! Ha! Ha!' 'When you quit laughing, I'll answer you. What's the matter?' 'You're at it again, I hear.' He laughed and then quieted down. The tears were in his eyes from laughing. He dried them, became grave, and said:

" 'Say, my boy, did you know you're in a mess?'

" 'No.'

" 'Yes, Alicia's lawyer was over here with detective reports and I think they have the goods on you.'

" 'Tell me.'

" 'Well, you and the widow walk to the tomb—this tomb business is what makes me laugh; on the way down between two hills you stop to kiss. Then you go on to the tomb. At the tomb the widow says to you, 'Do you know what I dream of, Skeet?' 'No,' you say. 'All of us here together,' says the widow. 'My daddy and you and I, asleep together for all time.'

"A thought of the straggler standing near when Becky and I visited the tomb went through my brain. 'Where do you get this, George?' 'Alicia's lawyer was over here with detective reports.' Well, to slit the throats of such people, to crucify them or burn them at the stake would be nothing. Hyenas prowl for corpses—but these beasts snoop for the soul's most sacred emotions. 'But even so, what does this prove? Nothing!'

" 'Not by itself. But you've been staying all night at

the widow's house; you've been coming from there at three o'clock in the morning. And this, in connection with kisses on the way to the tomb, make a kind of case—at least to my thinking; at least when a woman is willing to make a charge if she doesn't get what she wants.'

"'What does she want?' I asked George.

"'She doesn't want your alimony. She is waiting for an offer from you.'

"'Well, George,' I said, 'I'm the poorest hand in the world at bargaining. You can do that. The only thing I'm interested in is Mrs. Norris. Her name must be saved at any cost. I'd do that if she meant nothing to me. But she means everything to me.'

"'You secretive scamp,' George said.

"'Yes, everything. She is to be my wife. And as my old friend you must do your best.'

"'Shake,' said George. 'Here's the old clasp, Skeet. I'll put on steam now. I'll save you what I can, but I'll save your feelings and Mrs. Norris' feelings first.'

"'But tell me this,' George resumed: 'How does Cavette Errant happen to be Alicia's lawyer?'

"'Cavette Errant,' I exclaimed. 'That fellow—that man who beat me out of eight or nine thousand dollars—that scoundrel that I helped to save from prison?'

"'Yes,' said George. 'He's her lawyer.'

"My strength seemed to go out of me. One can excoriate, and rail at a threatened perfidy. One cannot speak when it is actually inflicted. The thing is done then. What is there to say?

"George went on: 'Cavette was here yesterday and went over the papers. He promised to see Alicia again

and let me know. I was going to his office today to take it up again.'

"'Don't you go to his office,' I said to George. 'Make him come to yours. Say! Send for him. Tell him I'm here. I want to face him. I want to study a face that can be up to what he is up to. I want to battle it out with him.'

"'It may be all right for you to meet. Be careful what you say. No use to enrage him. Don't commit yourself. Maybe it will save you something to come in on the consultation. But remember, be careful.' I promised George that I would be.

"Accordingly, George telephoned to Cavette that I was in town, in his office, and to come over; and in a few minutes Cavette entered.

"He was all smiles, mildness, conciliation. Yet there was a dagger in every word he spoke.

"'You know, Skeet,' he began, 'I'd never have anything to do with a case against you; I mean, I'd never bring one or try one. I think it's a good thing that I represent your wife; for while I'll be loyal to her, I want to see you treated fairly, and I'll tell her so, and do as near right between you as I know how.'

"He took out of his pocket a bundle of detective reports. 'Here are the reports on your goings and comings there in the country; and the trouble is just this: While I won't use this evidence either in a divorce suit or any other suit, there are plenty of lawyers who will. Our old friendship, your kindness to me in times past, prevent my using this stuff or being in such a case, even if I believed in taking such steps, as I don't. I've been trying to get Alicia to divorce you on the ground of

cruelty and make a fair settlement. But if you stand pat, she'll break away from me, get another lawyer, and all this scandal will come out. I don't want to see that; I want to stay in the case to prevent it. And I've been going along here with George Higgins, trying to adjust this, and be Alicia's lawyer, and at the same time be fair to you.'

"I looked steadily into the face of Cavette Errant. I knew he was playing with the facts for stakes. I knew that behind his smiles, his softly articulated words, his professions of friendship and regard for my rights, that his greed, his money lust, coiled and waited. Where could I strike him? How could I vanquish him? Neither could be done. His position was invulnerable, his strength concentrated behind insuperable fortifications. What he said was true. He would, at least he could, refuse to go on with the case if it involved a public charge. He could refuse to do that and yet secretly direct the proceedings in the hands of another lawyer. It was true, too, that Alicia might go to another lawyer when she found Cavette Errant unwilling to be in such litigation against me. I could see profound dissimulation in Cavette Errant's attitude, but I was beleaguered; and while I did not care for myself, I had no thought but to save Becky, and at any cost to myself. Cavette Errant closed the interview by saying that he would see Alicia again and do the best he could with her; that while there was no chance of inducing her to surrender her money demands, and be satisfied with a monthly allowance instead of a sum in gross, that he would save me something by sacrificing a fee. 'I don't want any fee,' he said, 'out of your money.' Then a saturnine expression came over his face,

illuminated momentarily by a Pantagruelian smile and he said: 'But, hell! Skeet, if Becky wants you, she ought to be willing to pay Alicia a good purse—as much as you are worth all together.' This was the only point of the interview that stung me to a betrayal of my feelings. I said with visible spirit: 'I can't think of anything viler than that. Before I would let any woman buy me or pay for me, I'd sink every dollar I have, and go to Hell to boot.'

"Cavette Errant laughed good-naturedly. 'Oh—it's not so bad—not that I'd have anything to do with such a case; but such things are done—and it all depends upon your point of view. Anyway, think things over. I must go back to my office.'

"With that he left.

"I pass quickly all the soul-wearing details that occupied me now the next several days. Becky's letters came daily as before. And I had to send the ruby and the diamonds on to New York, for she liked none of the designs I forwarded. She wanted to have the ring made in New York by her own jeweler. So I had to go to the jeweler's and get the precious ruby and diamonds and express them to her, taking particular care with everything to prevent any loss. And I was going to George's office and haggling. I was trying to save something from my little fortune. If I had no more than enough left to take a long wedding trip, or to buy a little house by the sea and give it to Becky, I could trust to the future; and with Becky in it life would be sweet.

"At last, after we had advanced and retreated, endured threats and recriminated felonious extortion; after we had talked over every detail until the whole case was in

threads, and we could express blocks of the matter in monosyllables, or glances, I consented to give Alicia $70,000, on condition that she would divorce me on the ground of cruelty. I had to do it. I was trapped. I had to save Becky. Cavette Errant manoeuvred me behind the screen. I could either get that much from Becky, or give it myself. The price was $70,000 or they would name Becky in the divorce. The offer was at last accepted. The case was agreed. And on an afternoon at four o'clock the evidence was heard, a degree granted. I was not in court. But George told me that Alicia sat straight in the witness chair, her head upreared like a cobra; that she returned to her seat by the trial table and watched the proceedings as cold and mysterious as a fog; and that in the judge's chambers, where mortgages and bonds in the sum of $70,000 were turned over to her, she eyed them like a hungry animal devouring its prey; and tucked them in her hand-bag with a gesture of quick self-satisfaction. No matter; I was free. I paid George all he would take, $250.00. I went to a telegraph office and wired Becky and asked her when she was coming back and I told her that I could come to New York; that everything was cleared for me on that afternoon and that I was free. George and I dined. And that night I slept as in the old days when I came home from a long tramp with Brose Horne around the woods of Marshalltown."

"And so you slept," said Bob Hayden, "and then you didn't sleep."

"And then I didn't sleep, because Becky didn't answer my telegram."

"Becky had murdered sleep! And then you ran back

to the cabin. And I came to Chicago, and George told me that you were in distress, and out there alone, and so, Skeet, we came to you."

"Yes, and I knew why, and I was never more touched in my life."

"Did you ever tell her that she had cost you $70,000, and that you had paid it to protect her name."

"No."

"Did you ever tell her that Cavette Errant wanted her to buy you so that he could get a part of the price for a sales commission so to speak, and that he was trying to capitalize your sex relations with Becky?"

"No. I never obtruded upon her one single thing that was sordid."

"Idealist to the death."

"Well, the fact is that I haven't seen her since these things happened since she wrote me from Maine; except that I saw her last night; and then there was no chance to tell her. It didn't come right for me to do so."

"Oh, you saw her last night?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hope it was a pleasant evening."

"Why?"

"Because that's all there is to it: pleasant evenings. Missing these there is nothing."

"That's your opinion."

"Yes sir, that's my opinion."

Kirby looked at his friend with pained and wondering eyes. Hayden resumed: "Surely you know that; and now that we have come to this pass I move that we adjourn to a food place and have some luncheon, after which we will return here and make up the verdict."

CHAPTER X

When they had returned to the apartment, and settled themselves for the end of the talk, Hayden began to hum The Old Oaken Bucket; and finally with a laugh he asked Kirby, "Do you remember the parody that George Higgins wrote on that:

'How dear to my heart is the old fashioned harlot
When fond recollections present her to view.'"

Kirby looked at his friend comprehendingly; and Hayden said, "Well, everything these days is different from the old days. And with the rest of it the old fashioned harlot is not in it with the new fangled harlot. She's an aeroplane painted the color of the sky; she drops bombs and Greek fire. I'll tell you, Skeet, I want to help you, and I'm going to tell you what I'd do; but before that I am going to tell you what I know, what I have found out since coming to New York. You are not the first man to be stung; and I would have been at your age, or at my present age perhaps—who can tell? I don't laugh at you. I don't blame you. I have been stung lots of times, and have gone through this same hell. I was married to a woman once who trifled with me. And I'll say to you that after all you're lucky, luckier than I ever was. I never had a woman of Becky's quality in my

life . . . never a love affair as beautiful as this of yours, painful as it has been, too. And that's why I was humming the Old Oaken Bucket. Times have changed. I am a poor old male courtesan, and hoping you will never be the same, I proceed to the verdict. Becky is incredibly hard and self-sufficient, and with a sort of flickering, dangerous Mona Lisa sort of detached smile, like an incantation, that bodes no good for you or for anyone who gives her his heart, as you have done. And I think you would be well advised to walk warily, when you walk in her direction."

"Isn't it too late?"

"It is never too late until you stand at the altar with her, and then it would be too late, indeed. As things stand she has cost you $70,000 and much suffering; but you can make the money over again; and your heart will heal. A year from now you may be laughing because you cried today. There might have been something worse: you might have been happily married to Alicia, and Becky would as soon have taken up with you in that case as in the case of your singleness of heart and previous separation from Alicia. Then you would have lost a wife that you cared for in addition to everything else. But you're rid of Alicia: and according to George Higgins, Alicia was the last word in coldness, and craft and deception. So that you are well rid of her. And in fact if Becky had not come along, you might have returned to Alicia and had many years, if not a whole life time, of splendid torture. I begin to believe that everything that happens in life is for the best. It looks that way as we recede from events and see how they fit into the inevitable pattern. But, of course, there's the pattern,

and it couldn't be the pattern with changes. So I don't know; and who knows about anything? That's where moralists are so shallow-minded and unlearned in the art of life: they are so cocksure that by following precepts and rules, things will be for the best; and it isn't true. . . But I tell you: I'd have it out with Becky to this extent. I'd tell her what you have sacrificed and done, and that you saved her public newspapering; for no woman wants to be newspapered, and those detective reports would have made great headlines, and Becky would have had no art with which ever again to set up at the Ritzdorf and call celebrities about her and talk about her daddy.

"Becky is mixed with Delaher, there is no question of that in my mind. When she came east that time and left you, and was going to see the 'satchel man' and tell him she had met a man at last, meaning your worthy self, she did meet the 'satchel man' and she was his. She had been his while her husband was living. He had written her those letters and all that; and no man goes mooning around very much unless there is something to moon around about. You get out of something to say on just 'friendship' so to speak. Well, she had quarreled with Delaher or she had a morning's reaction thinking of you, and wrote you that she loathed herself and all that; but she did not loathe herself so much that she did not return to Delaher, and on this very trip to New York."

"It seems terrible to think that Becky, Becky of my midnights with her, when she would whisper, 'I want you for mine, my husband', could do such things."

"Make up your mind now that they can and do anything that men do. If while you have had Becky in your

heart you could at any time have fallen away from faith, then you must know that she could do the same."

Kirby thought of Miss Enright to whom he had been drawn as he was coming east. He nodded his head and Hayden resumed.

"They are all fish below the waist. Nearly every one will kick over or soil a beautiful thing."

"Won't a man, too?"

"Well, yes, but because he is tired, and it's no longer beautiful to him. But a woman kicks it over while it is most beautiful, and unconsciously often, because she has no real æsthetic. The only thing they are æsthetic about is the matter of keeping themselves sexually attractive, and some of them are damned poor about that. Now just suppose that Becky was as well-balanced mentally as she is physically attractive, that she was as wise as she is charming, she would never have left you, never come to New York for Delaher or anyone else; she would have seen that a man of your brain and brawn solved her life for her, and that your love for her was the achievement of a lifetime for any woman and to be kept at any cost. She played with this love which had come to her, as Coal Oil Johnny played and wasted his incredible millions. She had this Delaher affair on the stove yet, and she warmed it over; and she has been whiffling around, here and there and torturing you to death, when if she had been a woman, if there be any real women in a situation like this, she would have stayed on the Rock River in order to have all the sweetness and life there was to be had out of this love with you. She didn't, and therefore I think she is a little promiscuous siren, with a self sprinkler attachment which puts out the fire when she doesn't

want it to sometimes, a self sprinkler that she had wished on her when she was married to that old man. That's her secret; she had to repress herself in those days; for it looks as if Delaher was about the only man in her life up to the time you came along. So this self sprinkler puts out the fire, and she can't really let herself go. And in her case every time she feels like dedicating herself to you wholly, the self sprinkler starts to sprinkle and puts out her fire, and with the fire goes the light: all nobilities. For she should almost lick your boots for sacrificing your fortune to save her name. It is rotten, Skeet. Here you want to be a writer, and by a wonderful stroke you get as much money as that; and then you give it away to Alicia to protect Becky and all the while Becky is crooked. But this is where your logic failed you: you should have known that a woman as conventional and cowardly as she was all along about your relationship, and as dishonest with you about her other relationships and all that, would never arise to the appreciation of your sacrifice nor make any herself."

"Well, that's wisdom to know how to piece the right conclusion to the fact, whatever it is," said Kirby. "And I didn't have the wisdom. I thought she was sweet and charming, and to be protected and served."

"Well, as far as that goes if the women were reasonable and reasoning like men then they would be mannish. What we love 'em for is their childishness, and what we suffer them for is the continuation of their childishness when we need them as helpmates. That's good, helpmates! Well, sir, take it the world around, either for their own uses, or for the uses of the brood, and the first is sometimes a transvaluation of the second, they will

take everything a man has and leave him a shelled peascod in the end. Alicia got your roll; the street walker gets the cattleman in the doorway and takes his roll; and if they don't take your roll they take your life, gradually and unconsciously, until some day you wake up and find that the years are gone, you are old, and you are all in, and she has had and has your life. . . There was a man in St. Louis that I knew . . . but before I tell you about that I want to say to you now, Skeet, that Becky almost took your spiritual roll, and now do you back up, get out of the doorway and don't let any other woman ever get you in it. . . This man in St. Louis was ambitious, and he wanted to finance himself a little while going ahead with his ambition. So he thought he'd marry a girl who had some money, and he found one as he thought. Her father was very prominent in financial circles, and they lived in a noble mansion; and so this fellow when he got started with the girl, and before he committed himself fully, began to inquire about the father's wealth, how much he had and so forth; and he even took the trouble to go over the records to find what real estate the old man owned, and how the noble mansion stood on the records. Well, as to that he found that the mother of the girl held title to the house; but perhaps she would leave that to the girl . . . oh, yes! And he wasn't very ambitious on the money—just something comfortable and enough to help him go on with his sculpture. That's it, art . . . ambition. Well, he married her and the wedding was an event, and the years went on, the old man failed in the meanwhile, and the poor fellow was working like a mule and finally accumulated a little fortune by his own work, sculpture falling into the thickets by the way. And then

the divine love came along, and he was compelled to shell out all he had made to the wife to get rid of her . . . and so he was shelled peascod.

'Gods and men we are all deluded thus,
It breaks in our bosoms and then we bleed'

"Take Alicia's scheme, her cold-blooded plotting! She came out to the artist colony to watch you. She knew or had been told by Cavette Errant that she could not clean up on you for a few acts of cruelty. She knew your passionate nature, and she may have suspected that you had a woman when you left her, and manufactured that quarrel to get away. Well, she finds Becky, and she knows that Becky is rich, and so there is money for her in it, either from you or from Becky. She couldn't lose, and she didn't. Talk about the men playing dirt with the women. How about the women with each other? Alicia would have trimmed Becky if you hadn't stepped in and allowed yourself to be trimmed to save Becky. It's all rotten, and the thing that makes me harden myself most against Becky is this indifference of hers, this ingratitude of hers toward the noble idealism that you showed and lived up to; for she already knows what you did. She may have heard it. She must have sensed her own peril. If you want to marry Becky and she doesn't want to marry you, she can't be blamed for that. But as far as that goes who the hell can be blamed for what they want to do, or don't want to do? Who can blame Benedict Arnold for what he did? He was built that way, but that does not help you to admire the man. Treason is treason and ingratitude is ingratitude, and you can't admire 'em because the

people can't help being treasonable or ungracious. I despise Becky for being what she is. I despise her for the way she is living now, surrounded by a crowd of dandies and empty heads when she might be having the delights of the mind and the body, too, out there in that divine place on the river. You might sit in at a table of cocottes if you were away from Becky, but I swear to God you wouldn't be doing it from choice . . . and what she is doing now is from choice, and in rejection of the beauty that you have made for her, and could go on making for her. . . The other night I was over there, and they inveigled me into going up town for some liquor for them; and like a simpleton I went with Minette and Jay. They nearly confidenced me."

Then Hayden told Kirby the whole story, saying that the check had finally been honored, and commenting on the embarrassment it would have been to him if he had let Jay leave Edwards without giving the check.

"And that's the kind of people that she is surrounded with . . . this student of Schopenhauer and Plato! This devotee of friendship! This walking memory to her dead daddy! Why the poor thing is so dishonest with herself that she can't be honest with anyone else; and it looks to me, Skeet, as if you by the great bonfire of your nature had warmed her into the semblance of a breathing beauty; but that even your great heat and devotion only served to make her more what she actually is when she got used to the fire."

"Tell me, Bob, on my knees almost I ask it, what is a man to do?"

"A man, a man like you is not to marry."

"What can I do? What is to be done with this matter

of sex? You can't kill it without killing your powers. You can't indulge it without love. If you love you give your soul away. If you don't love it is nothing . . . it is a degradation, and a soiling of your soul and a waste of your powers. What can a man do?"

"Well, first what can a man do by getting married? That is just a way of providing for the matter, the same as you buy a house to live in. But the question is, is not that the most expensive way of solving the matter? It's better sometimes to rent than to buy. If you don't like a rented house you can move, and go on; and for that matter there may be something about every rented house that you like a little; and the things you don't like about it can be avoided by moving. I am not trying to advise the whole world what to do; but you what to do, considering your temperament and the life that lies before you as to work and achievement. Marriage is not for you. Marriage is for the canaille who have the job of peopling the world, it is not for the elect who have the job of thinking for the world, and for the canaille into the bargain. And what is marriage? Marriage is sex. Marriage is just a way of providing for that. That's it and nothing else. It's sex, but poor sex, and its bills and boredom, and the dream and the beauty that leads one on fades out. Pan rushed into the reeds to clasp Syrinix. She vanished into air, and he found his arms around a bunch of half withered rushes! Gee, Skeet! I wish I had the wisdom to tell you what it's all about. I only know I have lived; that I have been married; that I have written bales of poetry to maidens won and lost . . . awful poetry it was, too, though set down amid tears and sighs . . . and after all this, all I can say is to

get a woman and get it out of you, and keep it out of you and don't expect the divine dream to do more for you than that. What was the name of that pretty secretary you had once?"

"Charlotte?"

"Yes, Charlotte! What's the matter with her? She's pretty. She liked you; she would come to you, and she is of a disposition and a life not to bother you. But besides you haven't got the madness about her. And if you lived with her, a sort of good will and kindness in the heart might grow up in you without disturbing your peace. And meanwhile she would be a help to you. Becky never would do anything for you. A woman who would be absent when her husband was sick and when he died would never do anything for anyone."

"Well, but he took sick after she left."

"Tell that to the marines. It may be, but I don't believe it. She was away on a romantic mission, and I'll bet the old man was sick when she left; anyway, he died when she was way off somewhere; just as she is here now at the Ritzdorf idling and drinking and fluffing around. And that's what makes her talk so much of her daddy, her conscience hurts her. She's chock full of that sort of acting, anyway. She's an awful little coward, and no doubt she thinks of the time when she will be lying waiting for death, and with time to think over her life. She will think about her daddy then . . . and about you, too, Skeet. In her heart of hearts, she aches for the rotten part she has played with you. . . Oh, send for Charlotte or go to her. We may start by believing in love, we end by believing in sex. No man of sense would ever think of marrying except for sex. Well, then, if that can be

managed without marrying, why marry? Don't be a fish. You laugh at game bass that follow the silver flashing of the spoon hook . . . nothing but hard metal, without nutritious substance. Well, what is a man who gets such a thrill from looking at a woman's fluttering skirts of silk as she walks against the wind and lets it imprint the shapeliness of her person to his aching eyes? What is a man who gets such a thrill from that, that he will follow the fluttering to the death, even as the bass will follow the dazzling deception of the spoon hook? Spoon hooks and skirts! How's that for a headline? Go over and see Becky and have it out with her, and then quit her for good. If you don't know of another woman in New York, look one up. There are plenty of them."

"I met a wonder coming east."

"Take her."

"I saw Charlotte just before coming east."

"Send for her. The one sure cure of a love affair is to take on another. Fire drives out fire. A new woman is the sure antiphlogistin for an old woman. Which having said, as it is written in the third book of the eighth chapter and the third paragraph of my most noble master Rabelais, he poured him a drink of beer, and wiping the sweat from his brow, proceeded to the next subject, the same being how to repaganize the republic. We're going to have a symposium up the Hudson next week at the place of one Bigelow Parrish, a most wise and merry wight and eke drinker and skeptic of the divine passion, and a believer in women for what they are, and what they can do for a man in need; and there we shall talk of affairs and particularly of the state of the country, and you come along, Skeet. We'll honestly have the time of

our reckless lives, and you will get so far away from Becky and that steam room she lives in, and all that nausea about her daddy and about friendship, that it will be as if it never had been. Friendship! Well, if you were the negative pole, so to speak, and yet a male, and had friendship for a woman, wouldn't you be good to her?"

"Sure!"

"Well, that's friendship, and without such works friendship is *non est*."

Kirby looked at his friend. What was there in life for a man who had come to this pass of thinking? There was no love, and yet Hayden had not lightly denied love; he had only beleagured its pretensions with arguments, with a wealth of illustration and analysis. There was so little left in life if all these things were true.

The shadows were lengthening in the park now, for they had talked all day; and the lowered light of the room, and this end of the visit, gave Kirby sober reflections.

"It looks as if life were just nothing, Bob."

"It is just nothing. That is just as true as you and I are in this room, if we are in this room, and of that I am not sure."

"That was actually the remark of my boyhood chum, Mitch Miller; 'it looks as if life was just nothin'.' Think, Bob! all these years I have lived and suffered and hoped and failed: and Mitch has gone right on with the sleep that he fell into more than twenty years ago. And he knew as a boy what you and I have daily learned and find more and more true with every day that passes. What time is it?"

"Ten minutes till seven."

"I have an engagement at seven."

"Yes, sir."

"With Becky."

"I suspected as much . . . and good luck to you."

Kirby took his hat and stood at the door. Bob Hayden looked at him with the affection of a father, and with a smile, a laugh and a pat on the back he bade Kirby good night. Then he turned into the room to walk the floor with his own thoughts. Life had come to be thought, and nothing more, to Bob Hayden.

CHAPTER XI

Becky was sitting quite alone waiting for Kirby to come; and she had been alone all day, except that she had seen Delaher at luncheon. Evidently Minette and Jay were somewhere in the country, too far to be reached by the newspapers. For if they had seen the item about Delaher, would they not have telephoned her or even returned to the city? No word had come from them. She had denied herself to all callers, but only a few had tried to see her: Mrs. Halliwell had telephoned, and a Captain Crothers who always pursued her when she came to New York, and whom she always turned away. Besides these, no one!

Why did not Kirby telephone her a good morning? She was thinking of him today in his strength, his devotion to her; and she was wishing that it were possible for him to come to her, and light the fire in her breast that he knew so well how to kindle with the ardor and the poetry of his tenderness. Would that ever be again? The interview with Delaher had been exhausting, and had excited her desire which she felt compelled to put away. Between thinking of him and of Kirby her being took fire; and the self-sprinkler that Bob Hayden had sensed in her nature immediately operated. She was biting her nails while talking to Delaher, and biting them after he left. Then she put on white cotton gloves to prevent this nervous habit;

and she had them on when Kirby arrived. Her fingers were bleeding, for the hang nails had been all torn away leaving the flesh raw and oozing.

There was nothing she could do for Delaher; but in her slickness she conceived that it was the part of prudence to see him for this last time, and proffer her friendship, and then to disappear. Whatever it was between him and her, it was over. She was furious in true woman fashion that there had been another woman in his life, and more furious if the woman bordered close upon their life together, or infringed it. She suspected the latter, but she was too proud to ask him any questions. She left him free of her spoken curiosity, or of her accusations or complaints, to confide in her as he chose. He didn't tell her the truth. He had in fact been maintaining a relationship with the girl who had caused his arrest up to the very time that Becky had come to New York; and even after she came, on a few occasions, when Becky had turned him away for other engagements. The girl had grown skeptical of Delaher, and fearing that he was getting ready to leave her she had brought this charge in revenge. So far the matter was blackmail, as Becky had termed it.

But no less there was the scandal in the newspapers, and Becky felt covered with humiliation. Delaher was known in the Ritzdorf, and well known; and the waiters and others knew that he had been a frequent guest in Becky's suite with the others. She received him at luncheon this day believing that it was an expression of her courageous and loyal nature, which it was, in part. But after all their association, dating back to the lifetime of her husband, and in view of Delaher's knowledge of her life and its ways and secrets, it seemed to her the part of wis-

dom to face this episode in Delaher's life and to see him while doing so, before leaving him forever. She had no idea of marrying him, and no idea now of continuing to receive him, in this tangled condition of his name. He had lied to her about the girl, saying that she had once worked for him, and that they had a dispute about her account as she worked on a percentage, and claimed an interest in the business itself; and that when he denied these claims she took this measure to force compliance to her terms. Delaher made an unfortunate remark while trying to convince Becky that he was telling the truth. The Rev. Merrill had once been in the newspapers in regard to a stenographer, and, in fact, had extricated himself from her clutches by turning the girl's letters which were frank to the point of obscenity over to the Federal authorities, and as the letters violated the postal laws, the stenographer's lawyer withdrew her case to save her from prosecution, for which release the stenographer gave the Rev. Merrill a clean bill of moral health. Delaher knew all about this affair, and while he was protesting his own innocence to Becky, he said, "I am just as clean of anything wrong as Rev. Merrill was that time."

Becky looked at him, a fierce anger rising in her. She cared nothing about Rev. Merrill; but to have him degraded was to have herself touched with a species of degradation: did she not receive the Rev. Merrill, and had she not talked of his learning and her great admiration for him?

"You are very crude," she replied, "to bring a gentleman of his standing into this matter of yours. He is a gentleman of spotless life; and your life is not, by all accounts, even if this story now is false. Dr. Merrill is

my friend, and I will not permit you in my presence even by indirection to question his life."

"I don't. I was only trying to show you how groundless this matter is."

"Why do you take such pains? You can be sure there is nothing between us to prevent you from living exactly as you wish."

"Well, . . . is it that way?"

"It is that way. I have given you my confidence and friendship. But if I have done so mistakenly, that is my misfortune and to be endured with the other disappointments of life."

She had been picking her nails nervously; now she went to her bedroom, returning to Delaher's presence with her hands encased in the cotton gloves. She walked across the room wearily, and sat in a little couch in the corner where the air from the two windows came in, when it did at all; for the heat was oppressive, and no breeze of moment was stirring. She looked steadily at Delaher. The conversation had died down, and soon the waiter entered bringing their luncheon. "I can't eat," said Becky, tasting the food sparingly, and finally pushing it away from her. Delaher did not know how to handle the interview, for Becky was too elusive for him, but he did feel that she was slipping away from him, and he did not wish that to happen.

"We have had very happy times together. I shall never forget your home . . . "

"You will forget it . . . for you will never see it again," said Becky. He was about to be angry. How did she dare to beard him in this way, this woman whom he had known these years and in the intimacy that had

existed between them? She looked him down, too, at this moment. And he spoke up weakly enough, "I am sorry. I was hoping that you believed in me." She was about to say that no one became involved in this way who was guiltless of all indiscreet living; but she caught herself, realizing that such a remark would impugn her defense of Rev. Merrill. And so what she said was, "You will be just as well off whether I believe in you or not."

Thus the luncheon passed. Becky yawned as she rose from the table and flung her napkin down carelessly. It fell to the floor, and Delaher stooped and picked it up, then tried to take Becky's hand. She withdrew it with quick energy, saying, "It is no time for you to touch me." She yawned again. "Are you tired?" he asked.

"I am half dead," she replied, sinking into a large chair. "I must take a nap this afternoon."

"Perhaps you would like to have me go?" She made no answer. What had she allowed him to come for, what was this interview about? He was afraid to ask her. He grew inwardly very angry and resentful. Becky looked to him rather coarse and hard in this light, in this mood. He began to comfort himself with the hope of another woman, other hours of delight upon some fresh basis. He said finally that he must go. He had an engagement. A little smile flickered on Becky's lips. He saw it, and confessed himself mastered by her mood. He went to her, lifted up her hand, but finding it gloved, he bent and kissed her on the arm, then took up his hat and bade her good afternoon.

After which Becky sat for a few minutes looking into the almost deserted street of this Sunday afternoon. Only a few taxis were passing. Then she went to her bedroom,

disrobed and crawled into bed. She was very weary, and oppressed, and wondering about her own nature, her fate to be. Her eyes misted a little, whether from grief or fatigue she didn't know. She thought of Kirby. She was looking forward now to his coming with great expectation. It would be the event of this day, perhaps she would get a healing out of it. Why had she received Delaher at all? It had done him no good and herself no good. He didn't need her financial aid . . . after all it was just another idiocy of idiotic days. Why could she not settle her life, establish her heart with Kirby, and help him to be a man, while lifting herself out of erotic restlessness, and futile searching? She got up at last and bathed and rested again. She took a drink of whisky, then dressed, in the gray silk, in the pearls that Kirby loved to see her in, from that first ecstatic evening they had spent together. She waited and he didn't come; he was late, and how strange!

At last the rap on the door, and she let him in, and yielded her kisses to him. "You have on the white gloves again. What's the matter?" He knew that this betokened nervousness; but why was she now disturbed? Was it because of him, his coming, her desire which she was fighting, the open evidence of the automatic sprinkler at work, now that his expected presence had set her imagination to working? "What's the matter?". Becky replied, "I am just worn out, that's all; and I must get away from here to get a rest."

"Didn't you come here from Maine to get a rest? And didn't you go to Maine and leave the fields and the woods to get a rest? Oh, Becky come back, come back. Be with me!"

Nothing that Bob Hayden had said could prevent him from growing tender when he was near her. She was so adorable, so sweet and soft and flaming with desire and loveliness! No! she might be all that Bob had described her, nevertheless, she was his, and he was hers. He might as well try to deny that his mother was his mother. And look! how like his mother she seemed. Their mouths how alike, wistful, delicate but rich; and the brows how alike, high and full, and conical. And the eyes how alike in their searching, their gnomic lights and changes, and their voices how nearly attuned to each other. She might have lain in Delaher's arms, but that did not make her less his own . . . no, for there was this mystical bond between them, perhaps their blood was the same, due to some ancestral union which neither one of them knew. To himself he was thinking of Shelley's line: "Would we were born of the same mother!" That something of wishing to be kindred in blood to the beloved one, that strange joy in an incestuous passion, rendered ecstatic because of its consanguinity, took hold of Kirby in these moments. He understood now what Shelley meant.

But as he said to her, "Come back. Be with me," she had vision left in these moments not yet enthralled by his presence, to see what that meant, and all that it meant. Marriage! and the daily life! She had been through that with her daddy; but here was a man young and powerful, and with a masterful will, and at variance with her in so many things; and how would they live? He had stripped himself, and what could he do to earn money? He could not live on her money; that would wreck their marriage, just because it would unman and humiliate him. Then there was the matter of sex; she feared now that

she could never have a child. She dreaded the peril of the maternal condition, for her nerves were troubled now almost beyond endurance, and how was one to avoid that experience? There was the maddening and distasteful precaution always to be compassed, and that soiled the beauty of love . . . she had already had enough of that with him and with Delaher. Oh, how loathsome is life! How beautiful in contemplation, in imagination, how full of snares and poison in the actual contact with it! What a garden of roses and lotus and poppies, filled with stinging insects, and serpents and stifling smells!

But Kirby, though not forgetful of how she had wounded him, nor of her faults, nor that strange restless spirit which was hers, and which in more deliberate moments he saw as an insuperable barrier to a life in marriage with her, still could not put by the feeling that she was his . . . his in the sense that whatever she was, or whatever she might do to him, she was not to be separated from him, any more than his mother could be separated from him. She might be absent, but the fact of their kinship could not be altered; and though she might tangle and trip him and give him sorrow it was his fate to have these things be; and to suffer for her and because of her seemed now, as he looked at her, to be a part of the mystical nature of his life. He could not bear, either, to think of the loveliness that had been theirs deserted and thrown away. How ruthless human beings are, who kiss and mingle their beings one with another, and then turn and separate forever!

And what meeting is the last? When does the door close forever on the one who departs, when the one who is left turns into the room, glancing here and there, and takes

up the minutes that soon grow into hours and days and years, which never open the door again to welcome the face that smiled through its tears, as if prescient of the tragedy at any time to befall hearts that love? . . . He looked at Becky as she walked to the little couch in the corner. In her presence he always remembered the sweet and gracious things she had done for him: how she had made her will for him, how she had welcomed him when he came to her there at her mansion on the Rock River, her thrilling voice calling to him from the head of the stair, her ministrations to him with music, her little gifts of handkerchiefs and ties, her whispers at night, her joyous embraces and her frank confidences about her whole life from her girlhood up . . . of all these things he thought when he was with her. He could not believe even with evidence before him that it was true, that she had given herself to Delaher. These arms around his neck, no! These lips to his in passion, no! Her breast bared to his, no! And there was nothing about her that excited distaste in him, nothing that in the operation of satisfied desire saw faults and took disgusts . . . that wicked malice which stalks passion and fouls it when asleep! He looked at her now to love everything about her. She was all blossom and dew and color to him, even though her face was pale and her manner distrait and weary. "Come back, Becky! Be with me," he said again with a voice full of tears.

He went to the couch and sat down beside her, stroking her face gently. She lay with her head against the back of the couch, her eyes closed, her body limp and strengthless. How like his mother she looked . . . and whatever she had caused him to suffer, what had he not done to her? His own difficulties had caught her like briars and torn

her hands; her feet had sunk into that mire that had almost engulfed him. What wonder she had run away. Ah! she was only a little girl after all; and his demands upon her would have taxed an Amazon, a radical woman of principles, but without taste, without this exquisite delicacy and gaiety and fancy which made her so adorable. A little girl! An elfin woman. And did she love him? The tears were in his eyes. He leaned over to her little ear and said, "I love you, I love you so. Come back. Be with me."

She did not stir, nor respond in any way. Her eyes were sealed like a fairy's, drugged on wild roots; her arms lay stretched by her side. He leaned down and kissed her on the bosom; and then gently compassed with his fingers the firm richness of her breast. What are we, he was thinking, we humans . . . what are we, who adore each other's flesh in this way, and who find in passion the dreams of unions and births and paradises and kinships and ecstasies over the prospect of death itself? Thus to die, here at the side of Becky, he thought, life becoming death, and therefore life in a great moment of swooning and flight!

She still lay inert, and now in gazing into her cryptic face he had a new impression of the shape of her nose. It was rabbit shaped, and she was freckled, and her hair had been blondined. It was all reddish now. And these revelations lifted Kirby out of his ecstasy and made him wonder what had been the result of her interview with Delaher. Had it been very trying and was her present fatigue to be accounted for on the score of what had happened between her and Delaher earlier in the day? He wanted to ask her about Delaher, but it would not do to

broach that subject now. And while he was thinking of this she opened her eyes and looked at him, steadily and with bright, bland comprehension, as if to see what he thought and felt, and how real were the words he had been saying to her. Then she turned her head away from him, and stared at the floor. She folded her hands, and the cotton gloves became conspicuous, and he remarked, "Biting your nails again." He knew that the gloves were a symptom of nervous resistance to desire; and though he had been conscious before that she had them on, a fresh realization of the fact convinced him suddenly that nothing of a romantic nature had happened this day between her and Delaher.

"Please quit biting your nails." And then humorously he added, "I know how you can cure yourself of that."

"How?" she asked caressingly and in a childlike voice. "Come back. Be with me," he pleaded.

She smiled at first, then her lips shot into a quick grin, almost a grimace; then she slapped his hand, and arose from the couch and rang the bell for the waiter.

"I am a little hungry. Aren't you, Skeet?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll have a nice dinner."

She went for the whisky bottle and the glasses, and when the waiter came she had him bring ice, and they made themselves a highball. Almost in a twinkling Becky's manner changed. She became gay and talkative, and danced about the room in his arms, and brought forth some pretty new dresses that she had purchased recently, saying amid his exclamations of approval, "I knew you'd like these . . . and that's why I bought them." "I love you, I love everything about you," he said, holding her

very tightly; and she smiled her delight, and said again, "Kiss mother."

After the meal her mood and manner changed again. She had moments of coarse, almost masculine power; and Kirby noticed them most vividly when she was smoking a cigarette, and flicking the ashes. Then it was that she often talked politics, of which she understood nothing, or else she was deprecating the idea of marriage, and saying that the real thing was friendship, and that passion was easily to be had, but friendship was priceless and the gift of the gods to perfected beings. She adverted now to a marriage with him. "Why do you wish to get married again, to me or to anyone? You really despise the institution. And if we were married it would confirm the gossip about us, and identify me as the woman who took you from your other wife. We never could be happy with such things constantly said about us. They would poison every hour."

He wanted to ask her why she had not thought of this when she was leading him to believe that she would marry him. But why point out her inconsistencies? They were too numerous; and he was weary of the struggle with her. Hence, he looked at her and said nothing. He had finished a cigarette and dropped it in the little tray on the table. Its unquenched fire smoked in little spires and Becky began to look at it, and then at Kirby. Finally, she said, almost harshly: "You always do that. What makes you? You should do this." And she rubbed the lighted end of her cigarette in the dish until it was extinguished. "Then the room is not smoked up. If you were married to me there would be a lot of things that you would have to

remember and if you didn't there would be trouble. When did you have your teeth cleaned?"

"Two weeks ago."

"They need it again . . . and really you must get you some clothes."

"Tomorrow."

"Well, see that you do."

"Out there in the country, I haven't needed anything, and one forgets."

"Perhaps you don't admire me any more." She made no reply to this solicitation of her feeling. Then although the moment was inappropriate for the question he asked: "Do you love me, Becky?" He knew these words were out of key when he uttered them, but he was a little wounded, and consequently reckless, and he was a little angry, too. They were both braced by the wine which they had drunk with the dinner, and their finer feelings were slightly blurred.

"Do you love me?" he asked again.

"What a question," she said sharply, and became silent.

"Why did not you write me from Maine?"

"I was ill. Besides, some people told me horrid things about you—about your life."

"What?"

"It's too vile to repeat."

"But you were influenced by it—into silence—into writing me that letter of farewell. You allowed this to be, without giving me a chance to speak. I have never kept anything from you. I have no secrets from you. Give me a chance. I'll tell you anything in my life you wish to know."

"That's all past now. It's no use to go into that. I don't believe now what I was told."

"What has changed your mind?"

"Just thinking it over."

"Since I came?"

"Yes, and before."

"Why before?"

"Because."

Was Becky just a child after all?—a child, but with the vigor, the emotional power, the violent strength and ferocity of the Neanderthal; and with a will that coiled, resisted, wrapped like a huge python?

Kirby took a drink of brandy from the flask and came to her, taking her in his arms. "Tell me, dear, what shall we do? Are we engaged?"

Becky shook her head.

"What do you wish? Shall I treat you as my bride to be, or shall we go on as we are now?"

"Go on as we are now!"

"You know I am free now—and it cost me, too, to be free."

"How much?"

"Seventy thousand dollars."

"That's not much."

"It's practically all I have."

"Well, Alicia won't have such a large income out of it."

"And I paid it for you."

Becky opened her eyes. Her face became a bonfire of rage. Her red hair bristled like a wild animal's.

"You're just a liar to say that. And you can't say such things in my room. This is my room; I pay for it. And you can be respectful to me here, or you can go."

Kirby did not betray his anger. He concentrated it and went on:

"I beg your pardon. If you will not be impatient I shall make myself clear." He was about to tell Becky about his being watched, about the evidence that he had suppressed with his fortune. But he wished to continue the interview a little longer. So he changed the subject. "I suppose you knew my father died?"

"I read it in the papers. But you can't change the subject this way. I want you to know here and now that I'm not to be bought for seventy thousand dollars, or for any other sum. Your affairs are your own. You married the woman; and I had nothing to do with it. You divorced her, and I had nothing to do with that. And a new time has come. Women are not to be bought and sold any more. They're going to vote and run things. Here I pay taxes and submit to laws that men make. They have mistresses and houses of ill-fame and protect them; and women as wives or sweethearts have to live like nuns while the men do what they please. In New York the unmarried girls are having lovers; or for that matter having love the way they want it. And they're just snapping their fingers at the men, and telling them that they will do as they please. The day of what men have called purity is over. And here you, by all accounts, have done what you wished. You marry a woman who doesn't suit you, and you divorce her; and then you have the audacity to tell me that you paid her off for me. I never told you I'd marry you. You're not a man—you're a coward; my mind is changed toward you; I wish my feeling was too."

Becky was all Neanderthal now. Her face was livid, fiery, blazing like the end of a burning stick. Her eyes

had sunk in her head, become small and brutish, full of malice. They opened and closed with the pulsation of a chameleon. Every coarseness of her features came forth huge and ugly like mountains in the moon through a telescope. Her nose, thick at the end, sticking ahead like the handle of a gourd, giving a hateful self-sufficiency to her mouth, was her most conspicuous disharmony. Kirby stared at her in wonder and rising disgust. But in a voice as soft as oil he asked:

"Did you see Delaher?"

"Yes, I did, and he's a rough-neck."

"Well?"

"None of your business!"

"None of my business, eh?" Kirby said, with a bitter intonation.

"Leave my room," Becky said.

"No, I'll not leave your room."

"I'll have you put out."

"You don't dare, Becky,—you don't dare."

Becky glanced at him quickly and wilted completely.

"I'll tell you what I believe of you," he said. "And it's important because I believe it. And you may be too childish to care what I believe; but my belief cuts some figure, as you will see. I'm going pretty soon, and I'll never see you again. I am done with you. You are everything that your friends have told me of you—and more. I am out of my delusion. You are an interesting coquette, a delightful plaything—nothing more. Your father had good reason, perhaps, to beat you with a rawhide. And I am convinced that I should no longer waste nobility, chivalry, love upon you. If you want to vote, like a man, you can take a berating like a man. Well, this

is the way it happened. You went to New York that time in the very midst of our Spring, our love there on the Rock River; you summoned Julian Delaher. That's the way you get callers, attentions, flowers. You summon people, and you flatter them with your benefactions. Naturally you get flowers and attention. And you summoned him; and he came. You threw the taunt in his face. And he took you. And then you loathed yourself, you hated yourself; and you fell into silence, not writing me, that time, because there is a fine part about you, very fine; and you could see me there a thousand miles away giving my best self to you, planning to honor you in marriage, and you loathed yourself naturally. Well, how about paying for you? I paid seventy thousand dollars to keep Alicia from naming you in a divorce suit against me. She had the evidence."

"How could she have?"

"She had us watched."

"So she's that kind of a person, is she? And I'm soiled because I became friends with you, and because you were tied to that kind of a woman? All I have to say is that a woman is a fool who becomes the friend of a married man—she's a perfect fool!"

"Well, anyway, I paid seventy thousand dollars to shut her mouth."

"She couldn't know anything—no one could. My letters to you mean nothing, even if you ever lost any, or showed them. And as for your being here, you're not the only man."

"No?"

"There were others."

"Others? I knew there was Delaher, but not others. I

knew he was here. I knew you received him . . . but I didn't know it was as bad as 'others.' You with your head in the sand, fancying that because there are many admirers about you, that people are fooled and don't know there is one favored one; that there are two favored ones . . . 'others,' as you say. 'Others!'

"You just argue. You just hack and hack at me. What do you want anyway? You have had everything I have to give: my hospitality, my bread, my wine, my couch, my affection, gift-tokens of my love—what do you want?"

"I want a mate; I want this thing which you should, but have not, given; a mind to be the companion of my mind. I want to be healed of my tragedy—for I wanted you as a wife, and now I do not want you. I want to forget the springs which you ruined—this loveliness which might have been perfection in the hands of a woman who was an artist. I——"

"Yes, I—I—I, always I—always what I want. How about me? What do you suppose I want? What have you given me, if you're going to balance accounts? Passion! Yes—well, I can get that anywhere. Love! Well, if what you give is love, if it means exacting letters from me at all times, when your father dies, your grandmother dies, or you get a sore toe, or something—well, if that's love, it's a bore. I told you that I was upset in Maine by these stories about you. I was ill. After all, how did I know what you are? You got me into this. You came into my house and took advantage of me the first time you were there. You're the only man who was ever bold enough, reckless enough, to try such a thing. You coiled about me like a snake; and when I got to New

York, that time, and in Maine, this summer, and all the time; they told me you were a snake, a devourer, and that I was just food for your lust; that you would devour me and pass to fresh game. How could I know what hands I was in? I never told you I'd marry you."

"How about the ring?"

"Well, even I could wear a ring as a friendship token. But you know I never said I'd marry you."

"Well, then, an intimacy does not spell a marriage with you, does it?"

Becky got up and left the room, returning with Kirby's letters tied in a package. "Here are your letters. You've stayed and had your say out. And now that you've said it, you can see for yourself that you have no case against me. It's weaker than mist, thinner than air. But you've said it; and I'm done, too. Here are your letters."

"I don't want them."

"Very well, I'll tear them up." She proceeded to do so.

"Now all the evidence is destroyed," he said. "What I wished to be a mating and a marriage you have made a liaison. Probably the evidence should be destroyed."

Becky turned to him again in a rage. "Will you go now?"

"Yes."

Kirby walked to the door, but hesitated to go out as his hand took hold of the knob. He fingered it irresolutely, knowing that it held the fate of years, perhaps of his life, in its bronze inertia; and that by these fingers of his at which he was looking he could turn it into destroying energy . . . or was it heathful and restoring release? No time now to think; and only what came into his mind spontaneously would stand him in stead for good or ill.

He was studying Becky now. Was it the drink that had made her irritable, exaggerating her volatile and quarrelsome nature? And if there had been no drink would they have come to these words? How tragic to tangle and wound their love in the coil and fumes of alcohol! He was sorry for what he had said . . . his heart hurt that he had said it. He had ineptly brought up these things which annoyed Becky in her already irritable state of nerves, in the reaction perhaps of the wine . . . perhaps she was right and he was wrong. But did he want to marry her? No, not that . . . never now. Yet in reverence of their love, their days together, her dedication to him in those first raptures of what seemed the innocence of a young girl, should this parting, as it now stood, be allowed to solidify into the fact of the manner of an expired love? Kirby could not allow this to be . . . Becky was standing by the little table in the center of the room, and he left the door and walked to her, taking her yielding hand in his. Her eyes were wet with tears . . . oh, how tired and bewildered she looked!

"Forgive me," he said. This he asked, even while he felt and almost resolved that he would never look into her face again. Death! this is death too . . . but the long death, not the death of closed eyes and stopped ears, but the death in which ears carry the echo of music that is hushed, and see the eyes that look on other scenes or into other eyes! She did not answer him. The tears came faster to her eyes, and then ran upon her cheek. She was too proud to ask him to forgive her; it did not even occur to her that she was partly in the wrong for this tempest which had broken over them so suddenly; yet the

tears flowed from her eyes, for she was exhausted, and she, too, saw that there was an inevitability and a finality about this moment.

"Let me kiss your tears away," he said, and he leaned toward her and took their saltness upon his lips. Then the tears came to his eyes, and he drew her yielding head to his shoulder and repeated:

> "When we two parted in silence and tears
> Half brokenhearted to sever for years.
> Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
> Colder thy kiss.
> Surely that hour foretold
> Sorrow to this."

She put her arms feebly around his neck. Then because he could not see her eyes, and would not know if they wounded him, he said, "There is one thing, Becky, that I wish you would do for me. If I were dying and I should say, 'take my hand dear,' you would do it. And this is the same thing. It can do you no hurt, and it will comfort me. I want you to tell me if you love me. Say to me, 'I love you.' "

She did not answer, and Kirby disengaged himself to depart. He took her hand and said, "Good-by, my dear," then turned and walked to the door. She followed him now, and again he took her in his arms. "Do you love me?" he asked. "Say to me, 'I love you.' "

Her face brightened like a sky from whose clouds the sun suddenly emerges; her lips parted as if she would speak. Then something inarticulate vocalized itself in her throat, as if her tongue had fallen back and become

unmanageable, like a dumb person's trying to speak. If it was a word it was undistinguishable. If it was "I love you," the words were caught between her doubt and her pity, between her passion and her impotence, and made into sounds almost guttural, like an animal struggling for the gift of speech, knowing what it wishes to say but unable to form the words. And Kirby almost terrified by this spectacle, and hardening himself for the opening of the door, turned the knob and hurried down the heavily carpeted hall.

He had just left the door when he heard something fall in Becky's room. He fancied she might have gone into a rage, and thrown a book; he divined that she had fainted and fallen. No matter he would not go back. He took the elevator, walked to the street, and went to the little hotel around the corner. Tomorrow he would see Miss Enright and begin the process of forgetting; perhaps he would see Bob Hayden. Well, there was the visit up the Hudson and the Symposium on What is a Republic. He was too fresh from Becky's presence to feel the tragedy of it all in all. It was like the loss of an arm, the fingers of which, though lying in the earth, still seem to tingle. She was not lost. She was in the Ritzdorf, not a block away. And so thinking, and very weary, too, he went to bed and slept.

Minette and Jay arrived at Becky's room within ten minutes of Kirby's departure. They had run in, having learned at last of Delaher's arrest, to help if they could, and to be with Becky in what must be her embarrassment. They opened the door, and found Becky lying near it. She was still in a faint, terribly nauseated and quite in-

coherent. Minette undressed her and put her to bed, sending Jay away, who was anxious to know how recently Delaher had been here and what had happened to cause Becky's collapse. He went away to find Delaher, if possible.

By midnight Becky was in the hands of the house physician and a trained nurse!

CHAPTER XII

Kirby awoke feeling fresh and vital. What a gift is youth! He thought of Becky as soon as he opened his eyes; indeed he vaguely remembered dreaming of her; but the dream, whatever it was, had passed out of his mind. He was tempted to telephone her; but restrained himself. He felt that a few days should intervene before communicating with her, if he did so at all. He was hardening himself. After all, had he not weakened at the last, in asking her love, considering what she had said to him? How she repelled any suggestion from him that he had made sacrifices for her. It was vanity. She could not bear to be told that he had done anything for her. She could not suffer the idea that she needed his help. That was it, he thought. And she was hard, too. Well, he would be hard. Frosts like these were good to toughen and sweeten at last the fruits of life; and he accepted them.

He decided that he would telegraph Charlotte, and invite her to come on to New York in order to give a girl, who had never been there, the happiness of the theatres and dining places. Becky was surfeited with all this; no one could do anything for her. But how he would relish the fresh delight of Charlotte, seeing for the first time the wonders of New York. How gentle and gay she was, and simple hearted and natural; and what a secretary she had

been to him in the old days. If he had ever loved her she would have repaid it with unstinted devotion; she would be of unfailing help to him as a companion again in his work. And thus thinking of Charlotte he called The Elizabeth and asked for Miss Enright.

The telephone bell awoke her, and in her drowsiness and confusion she did not recognize his voice. She had expected to hear from Kirby yesterday, particularly as the man she knew in New York was out of town, gone to Europe, and thus she was alone the whole day. Both men had failed her, and she spent the day in her room reading the Sunday papers and trying to decide what boat she would take to Stockholm, to which she was returning after ten years' residence in America, in Idaho.

She was not Miss Enright; she was Mrs. Watson, until her divorce granted about ten days before, from a man nearly twice her age, who had given her fifty thousand dollars to marry him. She had tried it and found that the marriage failed, and so she had brought about a divorce while he was away looking after his mines, and had slipped away to sail for her native land. There were details about the divorce that might possibly invalidate it; but no matter. She had a decree good on its face, and this money, and her youth and beauty, her fresh blue eyes, and sensitive features and shapely body, and vital health. She had been drawn to Kirby, by his athletic figure and animated face; and she knew him to be a gentleman and trustworthy. Hence at the last she had spoken to him, seeing that her reserve all the way east had driven him off for good, if she did not take the initiative and bring him back.

But why did he not come to her hotel to stay, and why

had he not called? Now that she heard his voice on the telephone, her heart took delight; and as he asked her to breakfast, she accepted, provided it was to be not earlier than ten o'clock and at her hotel, in the little room where canaries sang, and the fountain played. That was altogether agreeable to Kirby and so he made ready to go. But this suit of his was pretty bad, and after breakfast he would get a new one. So he went down at last and sent a telegram to Charlotte and walked to The Elizabeth, taking a seat in the little breakfast room and waited for Miss Enright, whom he chose to call Louise. She came in promptly looking like a flower out of the garden, fresh and gay and happy and musical of voice. She greeted him with evident delight; and when he told her that he had already chosen the name of Louise for her, she accepted it with a smile, saying that it wasn't her name, but it would do. She was lovelier physically than Becky, thought Kirby, as he faced her over the table, where they were being served with fruit and pompano, and hot strong coffee. Her hair was finer and more glistening, her teeth whiter and more shapely, her eyes were bright with clearer ethers. Above all she had nothing of a complexed psychology, such as Becky had; at least, Kirby had seen no evidence of any such thing, and she entered at once into the comradeship that he offered her. He wanted to know where she came from; and she told him, but not truly; he wanted to know where she was going and she told him; and she asked him if after breakfast he would go with her while she got her passage; he asked her for her story, and she gave it to him. He was always the repository of confidences such as these. Women trusted him. He had had them from Alicia, from Becky; now

from this unknown Swedish beauty. But when he said to her that her divorce might not be good, that he was a lawyer and knew about such things, her pretty forehead knitted a little with annoyance and she said: "Don't you worry about that; and don't talk about it. I am free and going away, never to come back."

"Why didn't you speak to me on the train?"

"I didn't know you."

"Did you know me when you did speak to me?"

"Yes."

"What did you think?"

"I thought you were a nice gentleman."

"Were you sure of it?"

"Quite sure."

"And you really wanted to be directed to a hotel?"

"Yes," and she smiled.

"When do you plan to sail?"

"Thursday."

"Today is Monday . . . have you time to play until then?"

"Perhaps."

"Very good. Do you want to go to the steamship office now?"

"Yes."

And they set off happily together in a taxi. They were going to lunch together, too; but meanwhile, Kirby was hoping for time to get him a suit and thus be more presentable, now that he saw gay hours ahead. They arrived at the office and he went in with her. She was going to Sweden, he saw her get the passage. Then they returned to the taxi, and he got out at one of the clothing stores and sent her on to The Elizabeth, arranging to meet

her at luncheon at two. By dint of urging he had the suit, which fitted him without alteration, pressed and ready to wear to the hotel; and they lunched and then set off for a drive through the park and up the Riverside Drive. Louise was very happy, and full of relish for the day and all that he did to give her delight. Had he ever pleased Becky so much?

They dined together, too, and Louise was dressed for dinner in a costume that thrilled Kirby, with its style and color and harmony with her beauty. Did she come from Idaho? He wondered about it. And then they went to the theatre. He had told her that he was not married; but he didn't mention that he was divorced. And he lied to her saying that his residence was in New York, to which he had returned the other day after an absence of some time. She sensed in him the adventuresomeness of the unmarried man; and he analysed her case in terms of the unhappily married woman . . . there must be points in common between her experience and that of Becky's. They had an after theatre dinner with wine, and went back to The Elizabeth, where he entered the elevator with her, and ascended to her room. She made no protest, and did not try to bid him good night; but unlocked her door, and left him to follow her into the parlor of her suite. She, too, had a suite. And he came to her now and took her face between his strong hands and kissed her. It was treason to Becky, rather it was treason to his feelings. But it had to be. He had taken to heart the admonitions of Bob Hayden to cure himself in this way; and what an opportunity with this beautiful woman, so natural and gay and rosy and full of life. What was Becky doing at this hour? Was Delaher with her? At

that last moment when his heart was almost breaking, and she knew it he could not wring from her a declaration of love . . . only that guttural utterance that materialized into no word of tender assurance. And why should he grieve that he was now with another woman, holding her face between his hands and pressing upon lips as beautiful as Becky's a kiss of desire?

Louise returned the kiss, then slapped his face mischievously and turned away from him to light a cigarette and seat herself in one of the large pink chairs which adorned the room. This long day together had made them very well acquainted with each other; for it is true that men can become friends at once, and men and women often need but an hour to appraise each other and to accept each other.

"Oh, what a good time I have had today. Thanks to you, my friend."

She gave him the confidence that she had a cousin living in Sweden who was a titled woman, and she went to her suitcase and brought forth a photograph of the lady. Kirby thought he saw a resemblance between Louise and this face. It was a very aristocratic head and brow, lips and eyes, with a sort of irradiate splendor in the eyes which he had observed in Louise.

"I should think God would be very proud and have a lot of fun creating perfect specimens of humans," said Kirby. "Some people are so beautiful and clever. A man takes a lot of pride in raising pretty and playful dogs, and I should think God would feel the same way about people."

"You are a very interesting man, Willis Aronkeil," she said. For he had given her this old pseudonym as his

name, and she knew it to be Scandinavian, but wondered after all about his stock. Again he came to her and took her in his arms; and they moved about the room until they came near the button which controlled the lights, when Kirby switched them off, and they stood in the darkness with their lips pressed tightly together. The technique of their approach was not very good, and Louise thought so herself, expecting that he would dazzle her with flame and seize her amid a bonfire, which would blind the clear seeing which embarrasses the first nuptial moments, and leave them both to hide and disappear behind red and purple and yellow splendors. But this would do, and as she had been for some months in a negotiation with the old man whom she had divorced, and some several weeks in a state of siege while her divorce was being brought about, she was hearty enough now to pass over the absence of an adroitness which she really expected from the gifted and handsome man who held her in his arms. And on his part he was transferring the passion that still belonged to Becky, to a new woman and doing it by an act of will, in part, and for the sake of his own freedom and peace of mind; and hence he was not at his best in these maneuvers. Also there was acid in his heart arising from germinating powers which were intended to be wine, but had stood too long.

At last he was lying by her side, in the semi-darkness of her room. The indirect lighting of the streets below suffused the shadows in the corners and on the walls, and the curtains waved gently from the air of past midnight. How wonderfully calm and masterful he felt now, and how soothed with a sort of pride in the consciousness that

once again the commandment of life had been obeyed, and that he could claim this kinship and this winning of another mate, another woman. And thus thinking he fell into a calm sleep.

She was walking about the room when he opened his eyes, for he had slept heavily. The last weeks with him had taken his strength and he had scarcely known it. He stretched himself powerfully, and she laughed merrily, and he held his arms to her. She came to him and gave him a good morning kiss. What was here but good will and delight with each other? And though it were but for a day, did it not break the wakings of hatred or regret; and how many were staring at the dawn today, cursing the woman in the room, or rising quickly to be out of her presence?

And thus it was day by day until the morning came when Louise's boat was sailing. He took her to the pier, filling her arms with a great bunch of roses and providing her with many delicacies. She promised to write him, and he told her to address him in care of Clark & Company, who had published his little book for him, still telling her that his name was Willis Aronkeil. At the gate where she handed her passage in, he kissed her good-by and with more words of delight over these days that she had spent with him she hurried on to the gangplank and disappeared at the door of the great steamer. But he waited for her to emerge by the railing on one of the upper decks; and she did at last. She waved to him a smiling adieu, and flung him a rose which drifted and fell untowardly and sank between the hull of the steamer and the edge of the pier . . . and so it would be with

these days now finished: they would sink! And he never heard from her, never knew who she was; and he never wrote her, and she knew nothing of him beside what she saw in those brief days. They were wild birds who had touched wings and had arisen from the congregating marshes of life, and flown each a different way, and become lost to each other forever.

CHAPTER XIII

When Kirby left the pier he returned to his hotel to sleep for an hour or two. These days and nights had been strenuous enough, and he intended later in the day to call Hayden on the telephone, with whom he had been out of touch since Sunday. From the corner he saw the Ritzdorf and the balcony where he and Becky had stood. It was a clear day of deep blue sky, and a cloud floated past the balcony and disappeared behind the building's massive outline. A flag fluttered higher up. The self-absorbed crowds hurried around him and the great noise of the city suddenly brought to his mind the silence about the cabin and Becky's mansion on the Rock River. He was teased with the old nostalgia; and after all, though his being was drained of the influences which had given him nerves and restlessness, and partly contributed to the bitter words which he had poured on Becky, still there was Becky. This association with Louise had not driven Becky from his thought. There she was enthroned at the center of his being, untouched of all his struggles to put her away; and indeed what he had done came to him in the guise of a stroke of the hand upon a dead face, which cannot be injured, and which only wounds the hand that violates its unresisting cheek. The dead do not turn the other cheek; they suffer the one cheek to be offended, and lie in an undisturbed calm which terrifies

further insult. So it was with Becky. She remained all that she was and all that she had been to him, no matter what he did.

Led by the old irresistible enchantment he entered the Ritzdorf, persuading himself that he wished to learn if Becky were still there. He would not go to her; he would only hear her voice and then hang up the receiver and walk away. For after all what had happened that night when he walked away? Was she now with Delaher, as if that could make any difference to him? He called her room; but the strange, heavy voice of a man answered. He asked for Mrs. Norris. The voice replied that no such person was there. Was it some further deception; was this a new man for Becky? He turned to the clerk and asked for Mrs. Norris, and was informed that Mrs. Norris had checked out leaving no address. So it had come to this: the suite of Minette and Becky had passed away; other people were sitting or resting in the little couch in the corner, or standing by the little table in the center of the room; other sleepers occupied the snowy beds; another drama of life was being enacted within those walls. This place knew Becky no more! How strange is life, thought Kirby, as he turned away, wondering what could have become of Becky. Had she possibly married Delaher and departed, perhaps on the very steamer which Louise took? He felt very lonely and deserted, and around him were the usual groups which throng the lobby of a great hotel; and they all seemed to have interests and companions: and how empty was this day for him and how deserted he felt!

Who was in his life now? His mother and sister lived in Italy; his father was dead; he had divorced Alicia;

Becky was his no more; his life at the cabin had come to a sudden and poignant end; he was out of any daily business; George Higgins had gone to California with his mother, and he saw in a quick moment that there was nothing now in Chicago for him! The great city by the lake had suddenly moved away from him and forgotten him. There was no one left but Bob Hayden, who was as lonely as himself. He saw himself as the one who always waits, who is always ready for life but can find no one who is ready with him. He had always been the waiter, and the one who was left while others went away on journeys, even as Louise had sailed today. And how soon would she be in the arms of another lover? Kirby wondered if he were not at heart a woman. For women are imagined as waiting spirits, sitting in patience for the face that brings them delight and completeness of life. He walked out of the Ritzdorf and went to his little hotel, and with the key to his room the clerk handed him two letters. One was from Charlotte, the other from Becky. He went to his room to read them.

He fingered the envelope of Becky's letter. How delicate was her handwriting! It reminded him of Shelley's, all the lines were so finely drawn, as of a light touch of the pen which scrawled flowingly in her slender hand, and ran downward on the surface of the envelope, in a revelation of her weakness of mood. At last he broke the seal and read:

"*Wednesday night.*

Dear Skeet:

It is now about ten o'clock, and Minette has gone out for me to make some final arrangements. For in the morning very early I am to be taken to the hospital for

a serious operation. No one can tell what may be the result, for the anæsthetic plays tricks sometimes, and this being so I wanted you to know that I have never made any change in my will, and do not intend to. The arrangement that I made for you long ago still holds good, and if I don't come out of this you will be provided for. No one beside Minette knows what hospital I am going to, and so no one can reach me with flowers or messages.

"Becky."

"How strange she is," said Kirby out loud in the silence of his room. "She really means this . . . no dramatics." Then he went to the table and poured a glass of water and drank it nervously. He opened Charlotte's letter now, and from it fell a postal order for thirty-five dollars, and in her letter she thanked him for the loan and said that she had used the money to help her boss pay the rent, and that but for this generosity they would have been ejected. Now things were better, and she hoped to be prosperous soon. What a good soul she was! And was she the sweetheart of a man who was using her for money ends? Always this devouring, this battle for money in which all the fine things of life become soiled; always the smell of the kitchen in one's room of life!

And what was this malice that assailed beauty? Could anyone have riches or fame, or love that this malice in the world did not spy the happiness that had come to fortunate souls and start out to destroy it? Yes, this was the secret of the catastrophe that had befallen Becky and himself. If she received anonymous letters Alicia had sent them. What had Minette said to Becky? Perhaps she had dispraised him to Becky. And there was Cavette Errant, who had tried to make money out of

Kirby's happiness and love. What other evil souls had become apprised of this happiness, which had come to him and Becky and shot arrows of fire and poison against it. Ah! what had life been with Becky? In that first Spring how gentle she was, how gracious, how dedicated; and to come to such a day as last Sunday was, when she was suspicious, irritable, bitter, untruthful, disloyal and herself a spoiler of the beauty which she had created. The world of malice had made her so. Slander, gossip, hostility, anonymous notes, fear, machination had destroyed that sweet and radiant nature which had been hers. Ah! if he could only bring her back to what she had been in that miraculous long ago! She would have made life divine for him, and he would have given her the calm loveliness of a flower that grows in a well-cultivated plot. She would have had his strength and his wisdom to rest upon. She would have been his wife, his mate, his companion. They would have lived together in that mansion by the river, in the healthful sunshine, working amid her apple trees, looking after her meadows, walking through the winter snows together, reading long hours together, growing in spirit and in truth together, having no evil secrets from each other, sharing all things together; and he might have sat with her when she held their child to her adorable breast and sang to it while it drew from her the richness of her being. And he might have gone on with his work, here in this America, a writer having tranquillity for the development of creations, having long quiet hours in which to think through poems that would in a disturbed life be thrown off swiftly lest something happen to take away the one poor opportunity to set them down. And their friends together, their hospitalities together,

the honor that would be theirs, and a life of peace with beauty and wisdom as objects; and Becky becoming more radiant day by day as the light invoked from the higher spheres of living shone around her and upon her face. Instead of all this, this wreck, with Becky in the hospital, sick and neurasthenic, and himself in this little room alone, stripped of nearly everything in life, everything but health and youth; and what were they with all the most priceless things that could ever be in life taken away from him?

Was every one now satisfied who had hated their happiness? Was Alicia content? Was Cavette Errant saying that he had done his best to manage affairs for his old friend, though the legal representative of Alicia, and that because he was not heeded disaster had come? Were they all sitting now with folded hands, all their evil wishes fulfilled in this ruin of the great days on the Rock River, with Becky in the hospital or perhaps dead, and himself turned from a being of creative powers to a being of reflection and brooding? Ah! perhaps Becky had died, and even now was lying somewhere embalmed, or perhaps she was on the way to the tomb by the river there to sink away into decay after these brief years of hope and struggle!

Thinking these things he was drinking from a bottle of whisky, and rocking in a chair, or rising at times to go to the window and to look out upon the city. Was there no way to find out where Becky was? He thought of calling Delaher, yes, even that; but she surely told the truth and Delaher would not know where she was. No, she was lost somewhere in this city, or she was dead. He was helpless to find her or to go to her; and he became very

dull at last with the whisky; and lay down upon the bed and fell into heavy slumber.

When he awoke the room was dark, and he did not at first know where he was. He had been dreaming of Becky's mansion, and he had seen her face with wonderful vividness. She was stretching her hands to him, and saying, "I love you so, I love you so," and he had felt her soft bosom against his breast, and held her to himself in the great tenderness that had been his in those lost days. She was smiling her contentment, her welcoming recognition of his passion; and his heart was going slow, but with those great powerful pulsations which bespeak life when running at the deeps. . . Now to awake and not to know where he was, to feel stiff and weary, to come back to this reality of the ruin about him: Becky in the hospital, separated from him forever, and himself stripped of all that made life life, all of it symbolized by this loneliness in a little room in this hotel in New York!

And at this moment Becky was in sleep, under the influence of an opiate; for her sufferings had been very great, and the operation far more serious than it was expected to be. She had been in great terror as she and Minette drove up to the hospital, fearing that she would be borne away from it in a coffin. She had been taken to a room; and she cried like a little girl when she was undressed and clothed in the white jacket in which she was to be taken to the operating room. This beautiful body of hers to be subjected to the sight of surgeons, to be handled, to be cut; and the dreadful suspense while the anæsthetic was taking effect! All of these things had terrified Becky and she had cried, and begged Minette to hold her hand all through the ordeal. She had turned

on the pillow in the room where she was prepared for the operation and wailed: "Oh, daddy, daddy come to me . . . come to your little mother and help her." Then she had been given an hypodermic of morphia by the nurse and that soon quieted her; but when she was placed in the wheel chair and while she was taken in it down the hall and to the elevator and up to the operating room the tears stood in her eyes. Minette was saying, "You are just as brave as you can be, and it will soon be over. The doctor says it is nothing, and just think you will be out of here in three weeks or less, and we can go back to the hotel or to the sea, or anything you wish."

Becky did not answer her . . . she was thinking that she would never go back to the hotel. . . . Then when Becky saw the machine with which the anæsthetic was to be given her she shrank like the victim before the electric chair; but surrendering herself, she said, "Hold my hand Minette," and soon was gone into oblivion.

She floated out into great spaces; voices called to her. Her husband's voice was loud in its call to her as if spoken in a megaphone, and he seemed to be telling her to go to Kirby. She was trying to go to her husband, to touch his hand. She was trying to reach Kirby. She felt bound, tangled, as in her life she had been unable to express her nature, to take the cup of life fully and gladly. And now everything was aggrandized: voices, influences, shadows, presences; and with a great booming in her ears, which was the heart of the world Power become suddenly audible out of the roar of earth, pressed now close to her consciousness in this faraway place of the soul to which she was drawn by the esoteric influence of the ether, just

as realizations and thoughts come to the intoxicated which never enter the vision of sober beings. What was love now or passion, or man or woman? And yet as the surgeon was making the incision and cutting away the menacing tissue she was talking very rapidly of many things; but in chief Minette heard her say, "I love you so, I love you. Why do you always ask me? I love you, I love you. I have never loved anyone but you, no matter what I have said, or done. Go now. I am ill . . . it is late. I am so tired . . . so tired . . . oh, so tired." Then she ceased to talk articulately. The words ran so rapidly that no one could follow them.

Now it was Thursday and she was sleeping and resting and making a comfortable convalescence. Minette had come in from a walk before retiring; and Becky had opened her eyes and said to Minette, "Oh it's you dear. . . . I have had such a good sleep."

"Yes," said Minette, "and soon you will be out of here. I think the nurse wants to settle you for the night. And I shall go to my room."

At this moment Kirby had arisen from the bed and was looking out of the window upon this city which was not his, and thinking that he had no place in life now, and that all places that he had made for himself had been taken from him. And so thinking and in a dull mood he undressed and retired for the night.

The next day he went to see Bob Hayden and found him walking the floor, restless and ill. He was having a strange pain which started in his upper jaw and descended to his heart, in a dazzle of agony across his breast. It was the beginning of angina.

CHAPTER XIV

"I HAVE been having the funniest attacks you ever heard of," said Hayden.

"What are they like?"

"Well, the pain starts here in the upper maxilary, and goes down the side of my cheek, then into my neck and then over to the region of my heart. And it hurts so that the sweat just pours over my face."

"That's too bad, Bob, you'd better see a doctor."

"What can a doctor do? And I think it's about time for me to die. I have had enough. I don't believe eternity would be long enough for me to get rested in. And what is better than sleep?" His face brightened with the old benignity, and he asked, "Well, how did you come out with Becky?"

Kirby told him everything with minute circumstantiality, and Hayden followed the story avidly. At last he said, "Well, that's over and well over. Now don't get into another. Keep your personality intact. You have had one good case of passion anyway, or love if you want to call it that. What we do in life is to learn things. We learn what love is and all it is; we learn shame, humiliation, treachery, hatred, loyalty . . . everything, if we live enough. At last we are worn out with the school, and school lets out; and off we go to play somewhere, or to a higher school; or maybe to take a long summer

vacation by rivers of water, and in cool woodlands. Who knows? But that's life."

Then Kirby told Hayden of Louise, and Hayden went into a roar of laughter. "Are you trying to circumvaginate the globe, Skeeters?"

While laughing Hayden grew suddenly and ominously silent. His face turned pale and then yellow; his eyes were fastened upon Kirby with a strange foreboding and announcement of the spasm of pain that had seized him. The perspiration poured down his face. After several seconds his color came back, and he wiped his face and exclaimed, "Whew! that was one of 'em."

"That is terrible, Bob."

"Yes, a fellow feels like he is going to die. You are just on the edge."

Then Kirby told Hayden that Becky had gone to the hospital and showed him her letter. "That's too damn bad. Well, I think you talked too roughly to her. That's always the way: advice is taken too literally when it is taken at all. You could have told her that you had sacrificed for her without being so brutal."

"She enraged me. Her manner was infuriating."

"The poor woman is sick. I'm sorry for her, damned if I'm not. I'm sorry for every one, for you, Skeet, and for myself. Poor girl. Who knows she may be an angel who has swallowed almonds and been embittered. Marrying that old man set her wrong, got her fussed up with herself; and once you begin to pretend with yourself, and build up arguments against the realities everything gets tangled. Then you can't tell what has happened to her exactly, what has got into her nature. I don't like her for having gone along with you until you made this sacri-

fice and had to make it for her, and then to have her not rise to the occasion like a big woman. But at the same time who can judge another? Why every one of us has secret motivations and reasons and understandings which are both beyond the ken of our friends and our enemies and are beyond our power to tell about them. All this time I have said nothing about you as bearing upon all this. You are not an absolutely perfect being, Skeet."

"I know it."

"Well, I should say not. You have an awful will, an absorbing and tumultuous personality, which must with weaker natures terrify or wear them down. You resent interference and lower your head bullishly at defeat. You came up to the city from the country as a youth out of a certain defeat in life: your failure to be sent to school, and blaming your father and mother for it; the death of Winifred, which was the defeat of your spirit. You have found yourself out of sympathy with your mother and your sister; the state of the country has ground your nerves, both consciously and unconsciously. Sometimes I think you were born in the wrong age. You belong in the brilliant days of the renaissance where beauty was a golden book of spirit and of sense; or in the age of Pericles, perhaps. Instead of that, you have lived in Illinois in a corn field village, in a half-baked city, a metropolitan boob, and you have gone here and there seeking the path, fooled by Alicia, making money and giving it away, trying to find and to give happiness, finding Becky at last, who promised a fulfillment of your hopes and dreams, and then suddenly changed on you and became a little pretender, and a hard little veteran of the game with all her charm and attraction for you. That's the

hell of it: it's when you see through them, but they still hold you for themselves or for memory's sake, that there is hell to pay. And yet for all this who knows what you will be, or what all this means? Sometimes it looks to me as if there are beings, call them 'They' who just mould us; and that everything that happens to us is to the end that 'They' have in view. But the devil of it is, how about you, and me? Is no regard to be had of this thing called I, located here in the center of my forehead and which sees all this and wants to shape life for itself, for me, and is not permitted to do so? Well, I say that life is hell. Youth is romantic comedy and middle age is farce and old age is tragedy; there's dishonor to the human spirit at the last; for just as it is richest with understanding and the treasures of thought and well assimilated experiences, something happens. You see what a woman is better than ever; you could be more to her than ever before, as a companion, a helper to live, you can appreciate her beauty more and forgive her failing more generously . . . but . . . sex has gone back on you; and with all the riches of your nature brought to this climax you lack that ridiculous power and she doesn't want you, and you are ashamed to impose yourself upon her. Could anything be more dishonoring than that? And the result of it is that men just crawl off and take to business or drink or checkers in the tavern. Just imagine yourself as you are now, full of desire and love of beauty and lust to live, for that is I; and then imagine yourself sealed so to speak in cold crystal that sharpened your vision of the world, rather than dulled it. There you would be encased and imprisoned and dishonored. The time comes when a man is like an en-

gine at full steam, but unable to direct his powers accurately, because something is wrong with parts of the machine. He becomes an eye and little else than an eye. Hands fumble, too tired to work or play; feet ache too stiff to run or walk. And it's partly due to the keen vision which sees that nothing much is worthwhile. And then there is death, which no longer seems like a departure to the clouds, a mystical transformation and a budding of wings; but the hole in the ground yawns, the worms crawl; and the careless nature of life presents itself as the city and your place in it, covering your memory, as water flows over the place where you have stuck a stick into it. I go to a club down there at home where they put on a bulletin board the pictures and the date of members who die. Well, frequently, I won't look at the board for a few days, and some day when I do I find something like this 'John O'Reilly died May 10', and the day I look it's May 16; and so the funeral is over and he has been in the ground nearly a week. And the club goes on just as if he had never lived; so does his family, in a way, and it's nothing; after all his struggles for money and place, after all the hopes of his family and work for them. That's what I call dishonor. Then all along there's the search for truth and beauty, and one never finds them, unless the occasional finding can be pieced together like the successive pictures of a film which makes one completed picture, and so a success of the matter. Well, as I have said, you have learned what love is; but all the while you will learn what the search is; and perhaps that's life and it's meaning. And if we never find our heart's delight, and never learn much, we have learned the secret of what it is to search; but what we shall do with that

secret here or hereafter, search me! The way I feel today death is the good long sleep and nothing more."

"You don't want immortality?"

"No, I want to get rested."

"Yet the world has been haunted with this hope ever since there was life."

"And out of it grows religions, and the myths of resurrections. How any reasoning mind can read a history of Rome, and see how Christianity crept into the crevices of the tottering empire, and with what classes it first got a foothold, and not see what Christianity was then and is now; that is, that it was and is a piecing together of Mediterranean myths around the story of a Jewish youth mad with the old dream of righteousness, God-drunk so to speak . . . not to see this is beyond me."

"I see it perfectly."

"I know you do. Why, just read about the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Trajan and Tiberius, read Pliny; better still read any of these modern books, the fruit of deep and scholarly investigation into the myths and old religions around the Mediterranean and the story becomes as clear as one of these faces massed and tangled in a puzzle picture . . . the puzzle picture being the reiterated claims of the divinity of Jesus and the authenticity of the New Testament by preachers and dishonest scholars."

"None of this worries me. The thing that I am bothered about is what I am going to do."

"I have been thinking about that. Are you going back to Chicago?"

"I don't want to."

"I wouldn't. If I could get away from St. Louis, I'd do it, you can be sure. I am worried about you. You'll have to do something. You hate the law so I hate to see you return to that. On the other hand, you can't make much writing, and the magazine game is a fearful thing. You might become an editor, but you'd go from one editorship to another, and you wouldn't have any leisure to speak of, and you'd be in an atmosphere which would destroy more or less your creative life. But you're young and you'll worry through. Don't let that bother you . . . was that some one at the door?"

"I didn't hear anything."

"Yes. Wait a minute. There goes the bell."

Hayden went to the door, returning with a telegram which was delivered to him, which he opened and read. "Well, so it goes. There's hell to pay in St. Louis, and I'll have to beat it back at once. Wait till I telephone Murray."

Hayden stepped to the telephone and told Mitchell that he was leaving at once for St. Louis, and to join him at the station if possible for a few farewell words. Then he went to the bedroom to pack and asked Kirby to come in where he could talk to him as he got ready to leave. "It's a money matter down there," he explained. "And I have to go to save the day. The same old thing, and so it has been all my life, and always will be. Do you wonder that I am tired? Money is not the root of all evil, it is the whole tree of Yggdrasill which encumbers the earth of living and clouds the heavens of hope; and there's no one to cut it down but the old skeleton with the scythe. Call a taxi for me, Skeet. The talk on what is a republic must be postponed to a future day, I'm sorry

to say. But, meanwhile, think it over, and come prepared to give us your views."

Hayden was packed at last and they were waiting for the taxi. They were standing at the window looking into the park, for both of them were in a reflective mood. Kirby had presentiments that he would never see Hayden again; and Hayden fully comprehending the problems in Kirby's life and the desolation that had come to him grieved that these things should be. Airplanes were flying over the park; for it was a day when an exhibition of flying was being given. "Look at them! Just look! Well, Borelli tried it with wings made of feathers; and Leonardi tried it with wings and some one else with copper tanks, and Montgolfier with gas bags, and there it is with planes like a kite, and a wheel whirling in front, sucking the thing ahead and keeping it up, too. Secrets! The secret always lies somewhere in an air pocket. I believe everything can be known, and every mystery explained at last. We'll know some day whether death ends all . . . sure. And that makes me believe in life after all. It's for something."

The bell rang now, for the taxi had come. "Skeet, take care of yourself. Go on and make the fight. It's a fine thing to make a good picture of your life. Do it beautifully as Hedda Gabbler said. I'll take you down to your hotel."

"No, just let me off at the corner. I'll walk over from Fifth Avenue." And the two men started forth.

Hayden was silent nearly all the way, except for a few brief words. But when they arrived at the corner, Hayden said, "I'll get out here and buy one drink. The

doctor says for me to leave it alone, but what's the difference?"

And they went into a buffet and had a drink. "Look at this place," said Kirby, "its brightness and cleanness and cheer, its good liquor and beer and lunch and tell me where all this talk comes from about the awfulness of the saloon."

"It comes from the people who don't know the truth and don't know life, from the people who have no desire for pleasant things, and who devote their time and energies and faculties to making other people unhappy, which is the real mission of the reformer and the uplifter. All of them have malice and meanness and cheese paring written in their faces. All of them are ashamed of nature, and are nasty in their thoughts, and have dogs in their cellars. They would take the full breasted figure of liberty from the American dollar and grave in its stead the thin-lipped resolution of Frances E. Willard. Thank God, Skeet, you were never a radical and you never will be. Good-by, my boy. We'll talk all these things out when we have our symposium on What is a Republic. Take good care of yourself, and fight and go on. Leave Becky alone and all her kind; and look up Charlotte and make her yours."

They walked out of the buffet, Hayden to the cab, where Kirby stood for a moment. Then with a quick change of mood Hayden waved his hand in adieu, and Kirby walked away, scarcely knowing where he went, or what he should do. He was very terribly alone now. His heart hurt him as if he were about to give away to tears. And he went to his little hotel, for lack of anything better to do.

CHAPTER XV

The days went by with Kirby trying to find himself, and adjust his attitude toward life. Physically he seemed very weary, or was it only a form of torpidity due to his inactive life? He had nothing to get up for in the morning, and hence he slept, breakfasting as late as ten or eleven o'clock. He saw some plays, and dined here and there. The people he knew he did not wish to seek. And so he was alone. He could not put Becky out of his thoughts, in spite of all his reasonings with himself. His judgment was clearly made up against her, yet his heart would not accept the decision. How lonely and stripped he felt himself; and Becky had been the great contributing cause of this bankruptcy of his, a bankruptcy both of hope and ambition, and of purse. As to that he was beginning to be worried. Megary had finally closed out the deal to Kirby's loss; then one day he found his bank statement in an old pocket. All this time he had forgotten to look at it. He was a little terrified when he saw that his funds were lower than he had supposed. He had given George Higgins a check in the settlement of the litigation with Alicia, which he had forgotten. There were other checks, too. Soon he would have to turn to something as a means of livelihood. But what should it be? How absurd sometimes he seemed to himself. Why had he ever written a book,

and put himself in a mood where his life as a lawyer was disturbed by the impossible dream of the literary life? Why, having accumulated a fortune, had he let it slip from his hands in that quixotic course of protecting Becky from notoriety? Becky who did not appreciate his sacrifice, Becky who had grown to despise his ambitions to be an author? It came back to him that she once said in a moment of anger, in one of her pets when the irritable moods were becoming common, "I know many men more gifted than you." And for this woman, who had no sympathy with his dreams, he had given away an independent fortune, with which he might have traveled, and upon which he might have lived while developing his talents, protected at the last by it if he failed as an author. What a fool he was!

And in these days every ugly thing that Becky had ever said to him descended upon him like poisonous flies. He understood now why men commit suicide. They were simply caught in a trap of life from which they could not escape. They were hopelessly dishonored and death was a relief. Some days he hated Becky with a hatred that almost stopped his heart; and yet he found himself constantly looking for letters from her, and hoping that something would happen to bring her back in the beauty and the gentleness of their first spring. But no letter came from her, and he did not know where she was. He inquired for her at the Ritzdorf twice, making it a point to seek a different clerk on the two occasions. After that he saw one of the same clerks on duty, and fearing that he would be noted for the character which he was: a man in search of a woman who has left him, or does not want

him, he simply walked through the lobby with the other strollers.

In this pass of his life he found that he was glad to hear from Charlotte, and that he waited for her letters, which came frequently, for he was writing her often. The days settled almost to the writing of a letter to Charlotte, that and wandering about the city, going to book stores, reading the many editions of the newspapers. What would become of that intense concentration which had distinguished his mind and his intellectual life, in a daily program as idle and wasting of power as this?

One day he passed a book store in Fourteenth Street and there were Greek books in the window, Homer and Euripides and lexicons. Twice he had begun the study of Greek, once at school, once when he thought his life was settled after he married Alicia and had the apartment by the Lake Shore Drive. Could he ever take it up again? No! Never again. He had laughed at the man in Marshalltown who had planned all his life to read Grote's History of Greece, and had never got to it. Who was laughing now at him? Who would understand how this ambition had been twisted and broken in his hands? Who would care? But how he had striven and worked! Very well! greater men than he had striven and worked and failed. What should his epitaph be? In a night of restlessness he had thought one out, and he could see how it would look engraved on a white stone. It should be: "I was a swift runner whom they tripped." That was true, he had been tripped all along the way. Why had no one seen him for what he was and helped him to its realization?

Six weeks went by at last, and he was beginning to

look forward to the return of his mother from Italy. She had written him expressing a little doubt about her ability to arrive by September first. Oh! this should make no difference to him. He should not be the waiter in a case like this! with his mother, an oldish woman, not for him a young man, living in a great city and with all the wealth of life spread before him. He was looking for something to do now, leisurely and cautiously. He had canvassed the magazine field a little; and once he had called upon the brother of a woman he knew in Chicago. She had asked him to do so, and had written her brother to expect Kirby sometime. He was a lawyer, a Mr. Kennedy, who knew Kirby's name as soon as it was announced to him; and so Kirby was invited to the private office. He had gone there thinking a place might be offered him; but nothing of the sort came up; and Kirby could see that he could not ally himself with this man.

One day when he returned to the hotel the clerk handed him a letter from Becky. It had been mailed at the village on the Rock River, so that he knew she was back there and out of the hospital. He sat down in one of the chairs of the hotel lobby to ready Becky's letter, first turning it over reflectively in his hands before opening it. What was she writing him? He opened the envelope and read:

"Dear Skeet: Constance and I leave for San Francisco tomorrow. She came west with me, and has helped me pack and close my house, for we are on our way to China and India. I must get somewhere. . . I must get rested; for I am worse off than I have ever been. A thou-

sand things harass me; and I am about to go on a strike that will spit fire. . . I am also done with gloom. I am going to do what the old Southern gentleman did after the war: get a big box, and every letter that looks like begging or gloom, I am going to drop it in the box, and end it. . . . Closing up the house is horrible. You have no idea what it looks like. . . Ghosts! ghosts! of happier hours. . . Most of the people who used to come here in Daddy's day are dead. . . My mail will go to the San Rafael in San Francisco, and as I move I'll let you know.

"Becky."

Kirby read this letter through several times. He sat there in the lobby calmly, almost listlessly, while around him the other guests, or the strollers walked, and none of them knew what he was enduring, or cared what he was suffering. Becky was ill, but was his soul not ill? And in these words she warded off any expression from him of his problems and sufferings. She would not hear of them! And thus there was to be no communion between them about those secrets of the soul which become clearer and easier to bear when confided to a sympathetic ear. She was done with gloom! She had wrecked the house of their love and their sacred memories; she had closed it, and wandered off to the Orient, and placed vast distances between herself and the life that had meant so much to him. Ghosts! but not the ghosts of their love, in this letter of deliberate farewell, but these ghosts of her husband whom he knew she never loved. And she could close the house by the Rock River! She could put covers over the chairs that they had sat in, and over the couch that had held them when she lay in his arms; and screen the

little fireplace in which they had looked in the long evenings of ecstatic dreams. She could dismantle the bed which he called his, and where she had lain with him, whispering in the passionate midnights, "I want you for mine, my husband." She could close the door that led to the little porch, where in golden evenings they had listened to the song of the robins, and where once in the silver dawn they had come to the couch that was there and had fallen into sleep again amid the music of the early morning. She could put hangings over the books that they loved and read together; and darken the dining room which had glowed in the candles of happy feasts, where their voices were silent for tenderness that was too much; and where all that ever can come into the fondest hearts expresses itself in smiles and in looks that scarcely dare to search the eyes they worship, but veil themselves as before the brightness of an altar! All this she could do; and then she could write him of ghosts and invoke them around the name of the elderly man whom she had married for the solving it gave her poverty, or at best out of gratitude for his goodness and his devotion. And thus he read this letter over and over again. How carelessly it may have been written, but what depth of agony it carried to him, in spite of the fact that he had resolved out at the cabin before coming to New York that Becky was not for him; and in spite of the fact that their terrible quarrel at the Ritzdorf had settled his mind against her and against any hope of her. Yet he had hoped, and now he grieved; for the last step had been taken, and by her. She had gone far away, having first wrecked the heaven that they had found together. She had done this and then written him. Surely if he had ever failed

her or wounded her she had now punished him beyond the measure of any hurt that he had ever inflicted upon her. These little marks upon this paper which he held in his hand were like the ignorant handling of a knife in the hands of a child . . . or were they the matter of fact words of a woman incredibly hard and self-sufficient? Thinking these things over again and again, Kirby arose and half unconsciously went to his room.

What should he do? To be occupied, to be at work is the only cure for brooding such as this. He knew this. Then why not write a book? Not that, now, in this hurt state of his soul, in the midst of pain which cannot be spoken of, and which prevents the clearness of vision in which it is diagnosed and expressed. Besides, did he have money enough to live on while writing a book? He forced himself now to look at his bank statement more carefully. Before now he had shrunk from going over the checks, and reckoning his balance. The finality to which Becky's letter pointed awoke his energies, his resolution to face everything in his life exactly as it was; and as the dog returns to its vomit his thoughts returned to the law! He found that he had $3,635.18 in bank . . . how he had fooled himself, believing that he had $10,000! What had become of the money? At any rate, here were the checks, and he was nearly $6,000 wrong in his supposition. That would last him a year, to be sure, if he were careful . . . but could he write the book? He needed clear spirits, a tranquil soul to write a book; and his mind was muddled, his will enervated, his desire to write lowered. No, the law required a lower order of ability; and this very mood of his would answer for that,

since it gave him a sort of feverish energy. If he had no clients, he might find some; but in any case his mother was returning, and she had wanted him long ago to perfect himself in corporation law in order to help her with her oil properties. He had passed that opportunity by at the time . . . for then there were his dreams, and there was Becky. Now that Becky was gone out of his life what more fitting than to flagellate himself into this labor that he had scorned and which he had loathed as beneath him, and not belonging to his life? Besides, what was this mystical interference with the career that he most deeply cherished? His fate was reversed from that of one of his ancestors who left the ministry only to go blind while running a mill to make money, and who got his sight back when he returned to the ministry. Twice to commence Greek, and twice to be driven away from it; to love, to find and to lose, to be despoiled of the fortune that meant leisure, and to part from the woman that had inspired him, and seemed the source of all noble living and creating . . . did not all this point to the law, to a descent in aspiration, even as he had already descended in life itself? And that genius in the nature of a human being which finds satisfaction in self-immolation, and self-torture took hold of him. If life were to treat him in this way, if it were to wreck whatever beauty he could create, let it be so. Let there be drudgery and ugliness. . . Let the Fates have their way! He could become prosperous in the law. His mother would soon be back, and she would help him. Besides, he was young, and opportunities would come to him. He would rent an office, in the same building that Mr. Kennedy was in,

if possible, and he would repeat the Chicago days of coarsened fibre and grim determination and the practical daily life of the happiness that comes to those who have no part in ideals. So thinking he went forth and rented an office on the floor below Mr. Kennedy, for it was the only room available.

It was a small room with two windows looking over the East River. He had to buy a desk and a rug, and a few books, and he had to call upon Mr. Kennedy to arrange for his admission to practice. For a few days he was very busy with these details. He had to get such things as pens and ink wells; and there was his stationery to be printed, and the announcement cards that he had opened an office, and the making of a list of names to whom to send the cards. Most of the list belonged to Chicago . . . and how foolish this was after all! Who in Chicago would have law business for him to take care of in New York? He wondered if something had not disordered his faculties . . . surely he had suffered enough to be a little unbalanced in his vision. Anyway, here he was in this little space in a New York building, with no reception room, and with a door which opened into a similar room occupied by a Free Speech Bureau, in charge of an ageing man who toiled all day at the futile task of sending out literature to the hoping souls over the country, the poor believers in the world's new and great age! How absurd this. How tragic, too! And all his rich living back of him . . . even those days with Alicia, then those dreams by the Rock River and Becky, who was now far away and gone from his life forever! Ah! it was necessary for him to set his teeth now, and to sit firmly in his chair, and not

to stand too much at the window looking over the East River, and not to drink from the bottle in his desk too much, as the useless hours dragged along, while the restless city of workers, those with homes and wives and sweethearts, roared beneath him and knew nothing of him! Then the nights back at the hotel when he tossed for hours wooing sleep, and thinking over the wreck of his life, and wondering what he would do if his mother did not return to help him, and whether he should not send for Charlotte and marry her, if she would have him.

What would she marry him for? Yes, he had come to this after the wonder of Becky Norris, to a doubt if even Charlotte Shanley, the stenographer, would consider herself honored or bettered by marrying him. Perhaps there was something to be gained in living through the depths of soul humiliation. There was nothing more to fear in this case; and he found himself repeating from time to time the verse of John Bunyan: "He that is down need fear no fall, he that is low no pride." Tears were gone from his eyes; he was dulled, if not calm, like one who has come out of great physical suffering, and scarcely knows what has happened, and does not care what is to come. If he had known ecstasy, and honor and love and beauty, he was learning humiliation now; and perhaps as Bob Hayden said he was being disciplined for something.

Mr. Mitford, the man next door in charge of the Free Speech Bureau, was very kind to Kirby, loaning him little things which Kirby forgot to buy; and selling him stamps, when Kirby suddenly ran short; and even helping him to address the envelopes in which Kirby

was sending his announcement cards. It was Mitford who addressed the envelope with the name of Cavette Errant, and Mitford knew Errant, and believed in him after a fashion as one of the free spirits of America. "He is a real radical," said Mitford. "He has been on the side of the poor and the oppressed all his life, and defended lots of people caught in the gin of circumstance." . . . Kirby had been thinking during some of these restless nights of Errant, who had played such a part in his life, without any reason for it that Kirby could see, and even against Kirby's wish. What is the nature of that malice in life that introduces a hostile and injurious personality into one's career on this earth, and keeps him there, in spite of one's struggles and wishes? And what was the nature of the hypnosis that would not pass away, but led Kirby now to send Errant an announcement card, even while Kirby was thinking of Errant as a subtle Caliban, a sea-green corruptible? Errant had robbed Kirby of that fee long ago amounting to about $9,000, and he had soiled Kirby's love for Becky by acting for Alicia, and trying to extort from Becky a large sum of money as the price of not naming Becky in the divorce proceedings . . . and here he was safe from Errant at last, beginning a new life in New York; and yet he was bringing Errant into this freshly created sphere by sending him a card. No it should not be, after all; and so Kirby tore up the card and the envelope as he went to the mail chute with the others. Mitford would not know it; but in a few days Mitford wrote to Errant on a matter connected with the Free Speech Bureau and mentioned to Errant that Kirby had taken

the next office to him. And so Kirby was not yet to free his life from Errant!

Thus the days went by. But after the settling of this little office Kirby had nothing to do. Once Mr. Kennedy sent him a woman client, who was having difficulty with a furniture dealer, who held a mortgage on some chairs and a bed which the woman had bought. Kirby did not know the local laws which governed the mortgage and he had to go to Mr. Kennedy's library to consult the statutes. It took him almost an hour; and this experience brought back to him more poignantly than anything that had happened before, the life to which he had come and the life which had gone from him. The woman was poor, too. She could only afford to pay two dollars for this service; it was all she had. Kirby waved her off saying it was a simple matter, and he would not charge her at all. And she departed thanking him, as Kirby turned to look at the East River, his heart full of hurt and shame. Could she possibly know what he was suffering, what he was and what he had become? . . . For the rest there were whole days when Kirby did nothing but read the newspapers and sit in reflection. At the closing time Mitford would come in for a moment to get a drink from the bottle which Kirby kept in his desk. Then Mitford went away for a week, and Kirby realized that even so poor a reliance at Mitford was something. These days were spent in entire loneliness, and he wrote letters to Charlotte and to his sister, the Contessa, and to Bob Hayden, careful, however, not to let Bob know what his days were, how painful and lonely.

Rent and the hotel bills were lowering his purse and

still there was no definite word from his mother as to the time of her sailing from Italy. At night the light of Broadway shone without alluring him. He seldom went to the theatre, or to a concert. Books had lost their charm for him. What became of the time? He simply rose and went to this office and returned to the hotel at the close of day, and lay down upon his bed to toss and brood over the sorrows that had befallen him.

CHAPTER XVI

Mitford's hair was streaked with gray, his face was soft with the fat of an ageing man, he was without energy. His eyes were misted with some sorrow. He smoked a pipe habitually, and his linen and clothes and shoes betrayed a desperate economy. He had lived well in his better days, now he knew the paths of decline. There must be some reason for a man of Kirby's appearance coming to the poverty of this little office, and this sterile opportunity for a law practice. Cavette Errant had written him that Kirby was a fine lawyer and a good man, and to give him something to do, if possible; but Errant had not intimated the cause of Kirby's coming to New York, and settling himself under these circumstances. Mitford was therefore a little curious about Kirby's history, and while refraining from asking Kirby any questions, he invited a confidence by telling Kirby his own experience in life.

Mitford came in one evening at the closing hour and accepted the usual drink from Kirby, then lighted his pipe and began to talk. "You don't seem to belong here, Mr. Kirby," he began. "And it's funny what things people get into. I don't belong here either. But here I am . . . after a good life, or at least a life that promised to be good."

Kirby was anxious to know Mitford's story. He knew

the therapeutic effect of turning one's mind from one's troubles to the troubles of another; and he sensed in Mitford some tragedy. "I wish you'd tell me about yourself . . . if you don't mind." "It's pretty bad," returned Mitford, taking another drink and refilling the pipe that had grown black with use. Kirby looked at Mitford and noticed that his complexion was pasty, his hair thin and stringy, his whole appearance that of a broken man trying to hold on and to go on.

"I think that my life is a good lesson," said Mitford, "against the foolishness of blowing up . . . and at the wrong time, maybe. What I mean is this: if you will read the lives of men, great men, too, you will find that they blow up at a certain time. They go on as steady as clocks up to a certain point, and then they lose patience, lose their balance, allow their long restrained indignation to have vent and then they blow up. Take Aaron Burr: he went on steadily enduring political calumny and holding his own; then, infuriated, he threw caution to the winds and killed Hamilton. After that he got into worse things and so never pulled together again. There's a man right now that is going to blow up. It's Bryan. He's been defeated three times. Well, he has already lost the smile that used to make him charming in defeat. He is already Hercules furious, and he's going to take up reforms with a malice, and malice will get his mind and his career, just as booze gets some men. I don't know what his end will be, but it will be something bad . . . you'll see. Now that's my case exactly. I was married to a woman that was no good whatever; but it would have been better with me to have stuck it out than to come to what I am now. I blew up, too late as far

as that is concerned; but I shouldn't have blown up at all. I should have gone on, realizing that you can't better yourself, at least after a certain age."

"Tell me about it," said Kirby eagerly, for he was all interest now.

"I have to go back a long way, but it's a curious story. When I was about twenty-five I met two women, and at the same time, and one of them I married. I went with the one I didn't marry first, but we talked marriage a little, and then I turned away and married the other woman. The one I didn't marry got married and became something of a figure in New York life. Her husband grew very prosperous. She had a sister who was married at the time that I came into this circle; and her husband was very wealthy. Well, the years went on, and I lost all these people more or less. But it turned out that the woman I didn't marry had a pique, and her sister did, too; and they got in their work on me all right at last. The woman I married was no good at all, as I said; but the children came on, and I loved them. They were bright and handsome and seemed devoted to me; but all the while they belonged to their mother and I didn't know it. And the mother with reference to her own future comfort or laying up place, or with reference to a bust up with me, was working subtly on the children and making them hers. I was busy and didn't notice what was going on; and I was planking out the money for everything they wanted, working on a newspaper, and finally getting into things that made me a lot of money. . . I had always had the ambition to have a country place, where I could have my friends and be happy. All the time this woman I married was no

good. I tried to build her up and make something of her, first by gentle suggestion, then by open talk, and finally by roasting her. But I couldn't do a thing with her. The children were having no raising, and were being brought up in the worst middle class way you ever saw. But I was more or less oblivious of this. Finally, I got together some money. I was now past forty-five, and I wanted to carry out some long cherished dreams. I made this money and went to one of the up state counties and bought a small farm, with a fine old house on it which I made over; and I said like the fellow in the Bible, 'soul take thy ease.' I was very happy now, and the children and my wife that was seemed delighted. My boy was now about seventeen, and I was depending on him to help me out and I wanted him to work to build himself up, but he took no interest in the place, and his mother began to scheme against me, and let him have his way and loaf when my back was turned. She would do nothing either, never raised a flower, or did a thing, and I was paying for all kinds of maids while she sat on the porch and yawned. I didn't know when I bought this place that these two women with their families lived here. . . I mean the woman I didn't marry and her sister. I sensed this as bad from the start, though I don't know why. But it was the sister that got in her deadly work, and not the one that I felt was piqued because I didn't marry her. Both women despised my wife, and never called on her or paid any attention to her. Now, somehow, I think that envy and revenge got to working here. I began to notice after a time that my children were never at home. I bought this place as much for them as for myself; but they dishonored it by going away to play, and they

were gone all day, day after day. When I came to and began to kick about it, I found out that they were at the place of this very rich woman, whose sister I didn't marry, as I have said. And I couldn't keep them at home. My ex-wife would let them go as soon as my back was turned. If I was in New York they would be over at this woman's house all the time; if I was home and at work on my trees or something then they would sneak off, and their mother encouraged them in it."

"Why?" Kirby asked.

"I don't know, unless she thought I was too particular, or thought there was no harm in their going. But of course there was great harm, just as a matter of discipline; and for a very particular reason. I think this woman saw that I had struggled up to this prosperity and to this country place, and she knew that I had something of a name as a newspaper man, and she wanted to put poison in my cup on account of her sister, whose husband didn't amount to much, though he had some money. But there was another reason: this woman was passing through a very peculiar sex period of life, which manifested itself in ardent interests in young fellows, which she masked under a maternal affection, having no sons of her own; and she took the greaest liking to my boy. It was the worst thing in the world for him, for he was just passing through puberty, and full of obscure longings and aches and all that. And this thoroughly experienced woman, beautiful, too, could just play on every string that was in his heart, and watch it tremble, and drink in life for herself through the boy's agitated passion. And that's what happened. Well, I knew life; and so I went to my wife and told her to keep the boy away

from there. It not only took all his time, and was bad for that reason; but it was putting him in peril. Murders grow out of such things, and all kinds of tragedies. I couldn't make my wife see this; she thought I was suspicious and cynical. But you would have thought that out of respect for herself and her own household, she would have helped me keep the boy at home, seeing that this woman didn't do her the common courtesy to call. Now listen to this: you know that if a man of my age, we'll say, began to play the game of drawing around him a lot of girls of eighteen, and affected a paternal interest in them, and talked about stimulating their minds and all that, no one would be deceived for a minute. Every one would think that he was playing with them, or trying to, and they would be right. But a mature woman can work the maternal racket while drawing around her boys of seventeen, and get away with it, and while wise people will talk and will know what she is up to, no one will lynch her, and many people will be deceived by her slickness, as my wife was by this woman who got hold of my boy. Well, this was the thing that wrecked me. How funny it is: you never know what is going to be your undoing. I hadn't done a thing to invite this catastrophe; I had worked hard for my competence; I had toiled up to the ownership of this place. And here I ran into a woman that apparently wanted to avenge her sister's wrong, as she chose to consider it, and whose nature was ripe and ripening for the tangling of the boy that she craved in her hunger which was accentuated by the period of her life. And with all of this I had nothing to do.

"Now it might be that I was wrong in sensing a revenge in this woman, but I am not wrong in saying that she took

my boy. I found her letters to him later, in which she wrote of moons on the balcony, and strange emotions while looking at the moon and wondering . . . all such stuff and asking him how he felt under the same circumstances; and to tell her freely all that he was experiencing in thinking of her and all that. Why, it was like an animal that loves blood running its tongue in crevices to lick up the sweetest drops lest something be lost. . . And so it went, until one day having talked and talked to this boy, and to his mother——"

"Why didn't you whale him?" asked Kirby.

"It wasn't my way, and I didn't believe in that. My way is to go so far, patiently, I think, then to get away from the trouble. This is where I failed. One day the water system got out of order and I had to set to work fast and furious. I looked for the boy. He was at this woman's house or off somewhere with her . . . and so I blew up. I had had months of this thing, and so I just blew up. I packed and came to the city . . . just left the place. Well, then the whole family turned against me. Evidently they didn't want me anyway. They had got everything out of me there was to be had. And pretty soon my wife sued me, for she had enough of me, too, and I had had enough of her after this experience, for I saw that she was a nothing and that I had worked all my life for her, and got nothing out of it. She sued me, and that broke me, without going into that, and so I went on, until I came here to this job with the Free Speech Bureau, and a room up town; and I say it's a gay life."

"Don't you think you were at fault, that you did some-

thing to bring this on you that you haven't told me?" asked Kirby.

"No, because when I say that I shouldn't have blown up, got mad and wandered off I have told the secret. What I should have done was to have stayed right there, and if anyone was to leave it should have been my wife and the boy. I should have driven him off and made him earn his living; and then taken the wife and thrown her out if she didn't wake up and go to work, and co-operate with me in what I was trying to do. That was my mistake, and here I am. You see the tragedy of life is this: that a man is dead a long while before he is buried. Sex is dead in him; his desires are dead; his interests are dead; his physical powers are almost dead, he can just get about to earn a living and that is all; he doesn't want what he used to want, nor want anything scarcely, for nothing comes along to take the place of what he once enjoyed; and so he just stalks around like a corpse and the city he knew becomes a cemetery peopled with stiffs like himself, and decorated with the tombs of buildings he knew and places he once frequented. Up to a certain age a human being riots and lusts like an animal, feeds, mates, drinks and all that; and at the same time, if he is a well organized being, he suffers on the plane of a god. But the time comes when he suffers like a god all the time, with no relief from descents into the flesh, and to enjoyable things of the daily life. Take me, what do I do but suffer? Think of the dishonor of working at this job, and for what? For that room up town and the meals around at the restaurants, the cheap restaurants. It's dishonor, when you consider further that I am too soft and afraid to end it with a pistol or in some

way; and so show the world and these things they call men, that I have something of divinity in me by ending the shame that life has heaped upon this aspiring speck of flesh. What do I care whether people have free speech or not? If they don't want it why should it be forced on them? That's what I admire about Cavette Errant: he is thoroughly rotten, like a good apple that has become fly blown, and has gathered all sorts of poison. He made a fight for the people, then he saw through them and turned his mind to getting money, so that when the day comes that the city turns into a cemetery for him, he can at least have a respectable place to live, and lay up with a great laugh at the silly carnival, watching it from a high window."

"I don't believe in that at all," said Kirby.

"Why not?"

"Because the game cannot be beaten that way. Cavette Errant will not beat it that way. The books always have to balance. You can't foul beauty and truth, and go out to make money, and sacrifice everything in such a cynical and bitter treatment of life without paying for it with the death of your own nature, with the death of the very thing by which a man lives. You just said that men suffer like gods. So they do, and so they always will, and the way not to sink into the mire is to keep the mind, the soul, free of the mire; and it can be done; for even in suffering we can be great. I think that you not only blew up on the matter of your place and your family, but that you are blowing up on something more important than they are: on life itself. And since you have confessed that it was wrong as a policy to have blown up on the place and the family, and that it would

have been better for you to have fought the matter through, it is better now to fight this matter of your own personality through. I have been feeling these days as you have now expressed yourself; but you terrify me with these revelations as to what these feelings lead to . . ."

"Oh, but you are young."

"And you are not so old. But even so: you have hit the key: One should fight, or one should lay down entirely, and not crawl along. By the gods, I hope for strength to fight or to die at once. And fundamentally a man should discriminate between action and unlawful action, and discriminate between action and inaction. He should seek no refuge; and while doing nothing, should always be in action. God knows that I am in the Valley, in this little office, sick of soul, so to speak; but I intend to fight through."

"Fight through to what?"

"I don't know."

"No, you don't know. But it is a nothing. Would you be rich? What of it? Would you be famous? What of it? Would you be president? What of it? You can preach to me, but it is only with your lips. Your heart is far from it. Already you know that as animals pass from youth to maturity and then to decrepitude, so this thing called the soul of man burns like a lamp until the oil is low, and then the wick chars and the flame stinks and smokes; and all this no matter what you do or what you are. And if your old age is glorious, as they say sometimes, in just what does that glory consist? In having your beard combed, and in sitting quietly talking nonsense about progress, and fooling yourself with im-

becilic praise of old age, like Walt Whitman used to do. At the same time I wish you all luck. I have seen you here, sitting all day long, and I knew that something was on your mind, that something has hit you, and brought you down out of some summer sky to this little hole, with that window looking out on the East River, while you wait for life to remake itself . . . and to what end?"

It was growing dusk in the room, and the lights were beginning to twinkle in the streets below. Kirby arose from his chair and went to the window, and looked across the river, then down at the home-faring crowds. He had developed through the years in Chicago the habit of thought of thinking of home at the end of the day. Once it was to go to the apartment that he and George Higgins had together; later it was to the apartment that he had when he was married to Alicia. But now why did he think of going home, since there was no home for him but that room in the hotel up town? He turned now to look at Mitford, since no word was coming from him, and he saw him with head sunk on his breasts. The drink had overcome his feeble nerves and he was sinking into sleep. He went over to him and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Are you drunk?" he asked. "No," he replied pulling himself together. "Do you want me to see you home?" Mitford smiled in a sickly way. "What's that? What's home?" "Your boarding place." "I am all right." And Mitford stood up and went into his office returning in a minute with his hat. The two men went out together and separated amid the crowds at the corner. And Kirby with nothing in his mind but a purpose to read again the

letter which Becky had written him from Maine, hurried to the room of his hotel. She had written him on that occasion: "believe it or not there is such a thing as friendship in this world. I am your friend—and forever; and I can be that if I am not close to you so that your qualities excite what is hostile in you in me." Now he studied these words. What was it to be a friend? If she were a man and left him in this soul distress would anyone call her a friend? What was it that he needed of her? Plainly it was her presence which she would not give, and for the reason that it involved sex relationship, which in her cowardice, and her complexed psychology, she fought to withhold; and so that which was of friendship perished in order to keep that which was of the flesh; and thus her whole spiritual attitude revolved on this little pivot of her sex emotion. And yet she was his friend! How small her nature was after all; and how dishonest it was considering that in her desperate veerings she had given herself to Delaher! What was it that he needed of her? Her association, her sympathy, her voice, her woman's counsel, all that the feminine nature can do to complement and make whole the masculine nature, for the two become one spirit and of integral quality and power in the real union of a man and a woman. He had possessed her, and by that fact had married her; but it was a marriage only of the flesh, not of minds, interests, communions. There was no friendship between them; and what she offered as friendship was the dishonoring protest of a strangled or dying passion. This relationship which had been so precious to him was a thing of shame and terror to her, and to be hidden and denied and forsaken, like an illegitimate child left upon a door

step. She was his friend! But it gave nothing for her to be so, it suffered nothing; it said nothing of moment; it wandered away to Maine and hid; it came to New York and fought remembrance with drink and with shallow minds; it deserted the meadows about the Rock River and their studies, all their delight of the mind. All of this because of this matter of sex, which in the emphasis of its denial became the controlling force, shaping and informing everything that she was and did. She was his friend! She could be his friend if she were not near him: she could write him that, and that was all it came to; and she could wander away to the Orient while asserting such a feeling, and there continue to be his friend, and perhaps to write him so. . . After all, why concern one's self with such a nature? "She is really a little fool," said Kirby, putting the letter away. Then wondering what had become of Mitford and what he was doing, Kirby lay upon the bed, and fell asleep, without having gone to dinner.

CHAPTER XVII

The letters which Kirby was receiving from his mother excited his fears, though they were marvelous in their self-control and courage. She did not say what the nature of her illness was, but only that she had been to Rome to see a specialist, and later thought of going to Vienna. For this reason she did not return to America, and it was December, at last, and she was writing that she might sail in the spring. Kirby was sorely disappointed over her failure to return. In his loneliness he had counted upon making a new life for himself with her, and he had been compelled in the circumstances to continue his stay at the hotel. He seemed himself more drawn to his mother now than ever before in his life, and often took from his trunk a picture of her made in her youth. She was more beautiful than he had realized in all these years of absence from her, and partial estrangement; and he fancied all sorts of kinship with her that he had not sensed before. What had been her soul's history, her disappointments and sufferings? He often read the letter over that she had written him when first announcing her intended return to America and her plan to buy the estate on Long Island. In a later letter she had asked him to call upon Mr. Breed, the man who was trying to sell her the place; and Kirby had done so, and

a few days after went with Mr. Breed to look the ground and the house over.

There was an apple orchard on it which needed attention, and a field which required to be built back into fertility, but the possibilities of the place were inspiring to Kirby's love of the soil and the life of the country. The land ran down to the edge of the bay; a few apple trees stood near the water, and near them was a grove of ash trees. How beautiful these acres could be made! As for the house it was built before the Revolution, and stood as firmly as ever in the stability of stone laid in the careful fashion of that time. There were many rooms, too, and how beautiful they could be made with repairs and slight changes, and with paint and varnish! Kirby was delighted with the prospect of living here. Perhaps the law would prosper after a while in New York; then he could commute between the country and the city, and go on with life and with his studies. Peace might come to his heart, too, with the lessons of love and shame and fear and hate all learned and his nature made thereby tranquil and balanced. In this walk over the farm with Mr. Breed he had taken great breaths of fresh air into his lungs and he had looked out to sea and heard the solemn toll of the bell buoy ringing amid the drifting mist.

He had returned to his hotel wondering what the dark passions were with which he had been tormented. Surely they were the product of the crowds, the strife, the congestion, the air of the city, impregnated with hate and fear and enmity and strife. Nature heals; only go to her and forget all that has wounded the heart in the false atmosphere of pavements and hotel corridors. And in this mood he wrote a letter to Becky, telling her of

his trip to the country and his hope to live in the house that his mother was planning to buy. He had touched upon passion, seeing in this moment of quieted nerves, an honest, if awkward attempt on her part to deprecate its destroying influence: "What you mean," he wrote, "by all these deprecations of passion, passion which fails and wearies, is that it is the seed that is sown in shallow soil, which withers in the hot sun. But there is rich soil, too, of sun and shadows, where sweet dew gathers, and where whether the rain be cold or warm, or whether the frosts come, the soil grows richer. When we are afraid, when we close our eyes lest too much be read in other eyes, when speech fails us, and the body of the beloved one becomes the transmuted presence which the Greeks in their mysteries, and the ritualists of a later day accepted as an expression of the life which renews life, then there is passion which has invested itself with every secret energy which drives poor men and women in that search for life that is not just daily existence and of the flesh; and for a linking up to something beyond this world. One time you wrote me that there was life beyond; and I hope there is, though I do not see any use of it if it be a continuation of most of what we live here. I can think of only a few that I would care to see again, only a few that justify another life in order that I could see them . . . you are one . . . I have a very boyish feeling sometimes, and tonight after this day in the country it comes to me: I feel as Mitch Miller did about Zueline, and I ask you to indulge me in it. Living as I am now, my father being dead, my mother and sister living abroad, my brother in California, and no one near me who knows about me or cares for me, I see that if I should die I

should be taken by the city authorities here and disposed of in some way, I don't know just how. And it shocks me, because I love this body of mine, which has experienced so much and taught me so much, and I hate to think that it might be cast away carelessly. So as I sit here now I long to lie near you in the long sleep in order that my dust with the great vitality of love might seek yours in some eternal magnetism of union; and in order that if there be something else of us, corresponding to light, or states of thought, that we might play and laugh, and seek each other and find each other, and never tire of playing and thinking, kept fresh for the game by loving gods who would be amused by our happy interest and delight. For once you spoke of our being together in that tomb by the Rock River . . . and tonight I pray that it may be so."

But the next morning when Kirby read this letter in the bright light of day, and in the clearer mood that it brought, he could not bear to send it to Becky. No, she had wounded him, she had proven false to all the beauty he had created about her. This letter would not do. Why should he reveal his heart any more to her, since all that he had shown her of his inmost feelings had not given her the vision of what she would mean to him if she would only come to him as she had done in the beginning?

In this resolution not to send Becky what he had written, Kirby turned in his thoughts to Charlotte reflecting upon the simplicity of her heart, the frankness of her nature, and her skill in serving him when she was his secretary in Chicago: how every morning she had his desk in order, how happily she greeted him, how unfailingly

she reminded him of the things he had planned to do during the day, how her understanding of the office and the clients and their affairs was given to him in daily suggestions; in a word how devoted she was to his interests, not for the hire, but because she wanted to see him prosper in his work. Then when he closed his office in Chicago, Charlotte had evidently met with misfortune, particularly with the man who was taking her wages to keep himself afloat; and to whom she had passed on the money that Kirby had given her for clothes and necessities. If she was doing this she was also on a romantic footing with him; and how was Kirby to end that if he made up his mind to have Charlotte come to New York; and if he asked her to come upon what basis would he receive her? He did not need a secretary, and he could not support her, and so what had he to offer her? Nevertheless, laying the letter to Becky aside, he wrote to Charlotte this morning on arriving at his office, asking her if she would like to come to New York to live; and if so he would do what he could to find a place for her, and he would send her the necessary money for the railroad fare if she would accept it of him. He was so desperately lonely that it thrilled him to think of Charlotte in the city, and near him where he could see her, perhaps every day, and take her in the evenings to the theatres and other places which would be of such fresh interest to her. Perhaps when his mother came he could induce her to take Charlotte to live with them; for she would be of great help to his mother; and if they would only be fond of each other! What was he really thinking of? That he would become Charlotte's lover, or perhaps her

husband? Their relations when she was his secretary were as innocent as possible.

In the enforced idleness of the law Kirby had taken to reading to while away the time. Something kept whipping him to go out into the town and find law work to do, to make friends and develop business relationships. He couldn't do it. There seemed to be no way. He had tried a few days to hire himself to law firms, to work at what they might set him to do; but he found that his inexperience in New York was an insuperable handicap. He had gone to Mr. Kennedy with this suggestion and tried to learn of opportunities; but nothing came of it. Sometimes he went to the courts, hoping that something would come to him, but no chance occurred. What had become of his luck, that luck that won him the $80,000, which he had lost through Alicia. Had he at this early age exhausted the tide which led to fortune; and was the rest of his life to be a fruitless waste? Something had laid a paralysis upon his energies, his vision . . . was it Becky? Was that girlish and gay, though unreliable nature a real succubus, dark and poisonous, whose touch had withheld his capacity for life and action? And so the days went by, and he sat in his office and read philosophy and history, and biography and poetry, devouring book after book; until the mornings began to dawn with something of hope and a sense of delight in the prospect of another day of reading and dreaming.

And one day while he was absorbed in a book, the door opened, for anyone could walk in upon him here where there was no reception room. It was Cavette Errant! That man was never to leave the sphere of his life! Cavette Errant! He was dressed in dark, loose fitting

clothes, a wrinkled overcoat, a slouch hat, worse for wear; and his face was dark and grimed, as it generally was in the carelessness with which this strange Caliban attended to his personal appearance. He came to the desk at which Kirby was sitting, and smiled the bland and winning smile that almost made his face charming, and extending a hand, the nails of which were dark, he said in the soft and musical voice with which he was gifted and which he had found it profitable to keep in tune, "Well, Skeet, I thought I'd look you up." He took a seat and resumed: "I have some business for you. A doctor here is in trouble, and I want you to help me out on it. He'll be here after a while. I left him at the Ritzdorf, and told him where to come. Meanwhile, we can visit a little. I believe I'll take off my coat; it's hot in here."

Surely Errant had not come, had not sought out Kirby in order to botanize his fallen state, here in this one-room office in New York. But just the same, Errant was here, and was gazing upon Kirby, a softness and a compassion coming into his face as he looked at Kirby, then averted his eyes, then stared upon the betraying barrenness of the walls and the floor. Kirby was thinking that Errant must be very dull of soul not to be conscious now of the contribution which he had made to this downfall, this day of humility; and yet he looked at Errant's brows and saw how insensitive they were, sordid rather than obtuse; and at his eyes which were gray and greedy and sunk in his head like the eyes of a sea monster. He was a spectacle of worm-eaten skepticism, of twisted morality; and as he spoke Kirby remembered when he had heard Errant sway audiences with that voice whose provincial twang and drawl lent themselves to pathos and to elusive paradox.

Upon the basis of such speeches, and little essays, Errant had risen to a spurious fame, with his head in bronze, and his face on canvases, placed in little town stores side by side with authentic notables. He was the friend of the poor, the oppressed! He had fought the corporations in behalf of the wronged and the weak; and yet, Kirby thought, his head would be the first to adorn a wall or a gate, and pour its ironic blood over them if revolution ever shook the masses. For he was the instinctive betrayer of causes and friends; he was the classical type of the deserter and the go-between. Would Kirby be in this state of impotence if this man had not soiled Becky with his scheme to extract money from her, and to profit upon the secret of Kirby's sex relationship with Becky! What vileness, what disgusting comedy, out of days that had been most beautiful to Kirby! And here was the Caliban who had written that comedy, who had managed Alicia's case, and taken money from the fund that Kirby had given Alicia, with which Kirby might now be at ease, in spite of the soul degradation of these days! Why was it that he could never be done with Errant, and that Errant stayed in his life ever since that day long ago, when Kirby as a young lawyer in Chicago fell under his unsuspected corruption?

In these few minutes during which Kirby's mind ran over many years and dwelt upon Errant's part in his divorce from Alicia, and his loss of Becky, the door opened and the two clients entered whom Errant was bringing to Kirby. The matter came to very little: it was only the work of getting an affidavit from a doctor in New York, for which the fee agreed upon was $50; and then Errant told them to go to the hotel and wait for him.

They left and Errant remained to finish his visit with Kirby, who was gradually mastering his energies to call Errant to account.

"I hope everything will go well with you, Skeet," he drawled, in his most caressing tone.

"You do?"

"Why, of course, you know I have always been your friend."

"Perhaps you would be willing to tell me what fee Alicia paid you."

"Why, yes, if it interests you. She paid me $5,000."

Errant was searching Kirby's face to see what was coming next; then he added. "I always told you that it was best for me to have this case against you rather than some enemy who would have made a scandal of your romance with Mrs. Norris."

"Yes, but what did you do as my friend?"

"Why, Alicia would have sued Mrs. Norris as sure as the world except for the way I handled her."

"I know that has been your idea all along. But it comes to this: you have big cases and lots of them, and why would you be in this matter against me except for the hope of big money; and why would you have the hope of big money except you thought Mrs. Norris had it to pay to save her reputation? As it turned out I footed the bill, and frankly I think $5,000 is a good fee for a divorce suit."

"It cost you nothing. I got it from Alicia, and she intended to strip you anyway, and what was worse she would have gone after your woman friend, except for the way I managed things. . . What is the matter, Skeet?

You act as if you were mad about this matter. I never dreamed of such a thing."

"I'm going to say something to you now. All your life you have been inveighing against the rich, and yet you have a hunger for money that surpasses anything I have ever known."

"I do like money; but I have always made it a point not to take it from those whom it hurt to part with it."

"Yes, to take it from the rich and not from the poor, as you did in that tax case long ago that you and I had together where we made the corporations come to time . . . I know all that. But that is not the whole story. It's not from whom you take it that controls the entire morality of the thing, it's the avidity with which you take it, and under what circumstances you take it. You were willing to take money from Mrs. Norris and what kind of money is that? You wanted $5,000 of her money and why so much for the common service of managing the divorce suit of your friend? You love money more than anyone I ever saw and you tried to get me to get money for you and Alicia from Mrs. Norris. As I told you then that I'd go to Hell before I'd permit such a thing to happen. So that as you wouldn't handle that kind of a case . . ."

"I told you I wouldn't . . ."

"I know you did. Then who was to handle it? No one but some shyster would take such a case to the courts, after a suggestion of settlement had failed, and I put quotation marks around the word 'settlement'. You see you sort of tagged or tabbed me in this matter, and then left me to think about it. The truth is, Cavette, I have seen

you work these things before, and I know how subtly and elusively you can move when you are after something."

"Gee! Skeet, but you're bitter . . . I'd do anything in the world to set your mind right. Good God, I'll give you back this $5,000. I can't do it right now, because I am hard up now, but I can send it to you, in a few weeks. And if you need money today, I can let you have two hundred and fifty or so . . ."

"I don't need any . . . I just want to tell you what I think once and for all, and if I am bitter, I am not angry now, and I can balance the facts with perfect justice, I am sure. You should never have taken this case against me if you were my friend; and when you took it in order to serve me as a friend as you pretended in turn for things I had done for you, you placed yourself in a position where you could not serve me and be true to the interests of Alicia."

"Oh, pshaw!"

"Yes, and if you do not see that, you are ethically obtuse, if I may speak with perfect frankness. What were you going to do for me?"

"Keep down the scandal."

"For money . . . and as it turned out for my money. Except for that prospect do you suppose I'd ever parted with $70,000 to Alicia? . . . Never in this world. Why would I have impoverished myself for a woman who had done nothing but defraud and injure me? I did it to save a woman I loved, and at that I didn't save her, because this has put a scent on her that has driven her forth like the mad heifer Io, up and down the world. This dabbing or tagging reminds me of a hog with a blue ribbon and a glossy coat, a prize winner, yet with its

snout fresh from the swill, that noses your new suit and smells you up. As sensitive spirits nothing worse could have happened to me or my friend. . . Well, then, to finish up what is good money and bad money: I say it depends upon how you get it and what's in your mind and the circumstances rather than upon the obvious matter of whether you get it from the rich or the poor. . . . The results, the fruit shows what tree was planted: and in this case the money came out of me. You didn't serve me, you served your client, which was right; and what you really had in mind when you said it would be best for you to represent Alicia, and not let her fall into the hands of an enemy, was that you could dicker and go back and forth between us, and bring about a settlement. I don't think for a moment that you have malice in your heart, or hate. I think you are fond of me so far as that goes."

"I certainly am . . ."

"Yes, you are. But money with you is above all things, or above all fine and delicate things. And the test of the whole thing is this: that you would never have touched this case if you hadn't seen a lever in it. It promised fair to get some money from my woman friend, and you justified that to me in that talk between us when George Higgins was present."

"And I do yet in this sense: I think your woman friend is a rich woman. I know all about her; and I think if she wanted you it was all right for her to pay for you. If she had, this matter would never have cost you a cent . . ."

"Oh, hell! such standards of life."

"Why, what's wrong with it? I'll wager anything that

if you went to any of your finest friends, and I don't care how sensitive they are, and told them this story, and that your woman friend was rich beyond any need, and that she loved you and wanted to marry you, and yet that she wouldn't pay or help pay to disentangle you from another woman to whom you were married, they would say that your sweetheart was not much of a woman . . . that she cared more for money than she did for you. And right here I'll ask you a question since you have asked me some . . . if you don't mind . . ."

"Go ahead."

"Did Becky pay you back any of the money that this cost you?"

"Not a cent, I should say not . . ."

"Did she offer to . . ."

"No."

"She knows what it cost you?"

"Yes."

"Well, Skeet, she's a skate, a nothing of a woman. And the thing for you to regret is not the money, for you can make that over again, and more too; but the thing to regret is that you ever spent a cent on such a woman. Hell! I'm about twenty years older than you, and I've seen a lot, and this thing called sensitiveness becomes a different matter when you have lived a lot and know the game of life from a thousand angles instead of a hundred. And it's just pure bosh to talk of love and ideals in a matter like this, and apply them to the course of saving a rich woman from paying a cent toward the liquidation of a bill which she jointly contracted; while you give up everything you have in the world to save her name and settle with the wife that has the goods on you

and her. Why, it's the most quixotic thing I ever heard of. I never dreamed for a minute but what you had a sweetheart who, having gone on with you into a long intimacy and with the idea of marriage at last, had helped to foot the bill; and when I heard that you had settled in New York I supposed you were flying high."

"This office doesn't look much like it."

"No, it doesn't. You'd better go to work, and not dream so much."

"Go to work at what?"

"Anything! Scare up something . . . get busy. Becky Norris has doped you. She has taken your pep. Throw her off . . . get her out of your system; get another woman. . . . What time is it?"

Errant took out his watch with a quick energy that was so characteristic of him, and grabbing up his coat said: "I must go. If you have time, come over to the Chelsea and see me. I'll be here two, three days. Send in your bill for this work for the doctor. He'll pay all right. So long."

And he hurried out self-absorbed, his mind on other things than Kirby and this interview. The thought that would not go out of Kirby's mind was the picture of himself sitting alone and briefless in this little office and suddenly discovered and assayed by Cavette Errant. He turned to his reading to drive the feelings of shame out of his mind, and found himself interpreting life in books and reading them into his own experiences, back and forth in a process of weaving. What was the garment to be which he was fashioning in this manner?

CHAPTER XVIII

Kirby had sent a notice of the opening of his law office to Hanson Halliwell, the publisher. After some months Halliwell had met Evelyn Lyman, Becky's girlhood friend, though in truth no more her friend; and Evelyn had finally written a note to Kirby inviting him to dinner. She supposed that he had returned to the Rock River cabin, and she knew in part and sensed in part the disaster that had befallen the affair between him and Becky. When she heard through Halliwell that Kirby was trying to practice law in New York she divined that he was in hard straits, at least on the score of having anything to do. She had mentioned the matter to her husband, and he had said: "A hard game, but he may make it go." Evelyn knew that Becky had wandered west on her way to the Orient, indulging as she always had, during her husband's life as well, this restless mania for futile change of scene. She saw the strength and the natural qualities of Kirby's character and sincerely deplored his entanglement; and feeling that he might now be in the hard convalescence of a wounded heart she conceived the idea of having him for dinner, to give him delight and relief from his regrets.

Evelyn lived in Fifty-second street, in a fine old house, and she greeted Kirby warmly, introducing him to Mr. Lyman, who was cordial, and glad to have the chance to

talk to this young man, of whose gifts and something of whose history he had heard from his wife. The three dined together; and after the meal Mr. Lyman excused himself to go to the club for an hour or so, leaving Evelyn and Kirby to the opportunity of a comfortable talk.

They sat in the rear room of a suite, before a fire of logs, and Kirby's eyes feasted upon the choice pictures and works of art which Evelyn had collected here and there: some wonderful Japanese masks, and tables of teakwood, and exquisite marbles from Italy. He was happy and at ease, sitting beside this charming and gracious woman, who seemed to appreciate him, and by that fact to indicate that she thought Becky had not played the right part with him. All through the meal she sensed that Kirby had suffered for Becky and because of her, and she wished to do something to bring him out of his soul's ordeal.

"I'm giving a little dance Thursday of this week, and I want you to come."

"But I don't dance very well."

"Oh, well, you dance well enough; and there will be people here that you know: Mr. and Mrs. Halliwell; besides some people that I want you to know, an artist woman from Baltimore and her husband who are in town. Her name is Rene Aldrich and she is a wonderful girl, so pretty and gay and well read. Her husband is just as fine as she is. You must get acquainted here, and go around and enjoy yourself. You mustn't keep—shall I say it?"

"Yes."

"Don't brood about Becky. In what I say to you of Becky don't think me catty. But I feel impelled to say to you that she is not worth your thought about her."

"Yet you were friends once."

"At school when we were girls, and since. But I defy anyone to remain her friend. She has a way of taking people up and exhausting what she finds in them, and then throwing them aside. I never felt sorrier for anyone than I did for a singer that she took up here one time. She was at the Ritzdorf, as usual, and she heard of this singer and managed somehow to get her to come to dinner. Well, sometimes it looks as if she likes to get gifted people into her presence and then wound them where they can't protect themselves. It is a kind of terrible envy on her part; for Becky is not gifted, it is all a pretense, that and her reading of heavy books. She likes to make an impression; and she can do it up to a certain point. I wonder that you got along with her as well as you did, for her purpose was to wear you, since you had a fame in the world or at least the beginning of one. Yet she didn't exhaust you at that."

"Perhaps she loved me."

"I never saw her more adoring with any man."

"You have seen her adoring with other men?"

"Oh, my! But I was going to tell you about that singer. The singer came to dinner, and Becky overwhelmed her with kindness, gave her an Oriental shawl, did everything for her. Then suddenly Becky turned to talking music, of which she knows nothing, for you know Becky hasn't gone to school since she was fourteen, and her education is very superficial and imperfect. Well, she contradicted this singer on a technical point of music, told her in fact that she did not know what she was talking about. Then she veered and was gracious again, and pretty soon bowed her out, having called a cab to take the poor thing away,

thus killing her off with kindness. That's the way she does. She hunts celebrities, then when she thinks she has taken their measure she turns them away. I never felt so sorry for anyone in my life as I did for this woman. Wait till you see Rene Aldrich. I have often wished that Becky could meet Rene, for Rene would simply smile her into silence, and make her feel how inferior is her personality to a woman like Rene. At the same time Becky knows that she has the advantage when she sets the stage herself, and is in her own suite or house; and this generosity and hospitality of hers disarms people. They can't fight back in time. They are put out before they know what has happened. It's like offering to kiss a person and then instead of kissing them, spitting in their face."

"How funny!"

"Well, I went on for years with Becky, in fact, until her husband died, and then I could stand her ways no longer. She was with me in the mountains when the news came that he had died, and she didn't act, except in a very cunning way. She shed no tear; simply withdrew to her room and packed. She wanted me to go back west with her, and of course I went. On the train she sat without saying a word; and at night in the compartment she was as silent as a shadow. Once after she had retired I heard her sob. Of course Mr. Norris was wonderfully good to her, and she had gratitude and a certain daughter-like affection for him; but that was all. But all this talk about her daddy to this day makes me tired. It is a pose, and to mask her various romantic interests. Once when Constance was asking her who was the most wonderful man of her acquaintance . . . there were several in the room . . . Becky answered with grave sin-

cerity, 'My husband'. Then Constance much impressed went about telling what Becky had said, and asking 'wasn't that wonderful?' Why there were times when she loathed Mr. Norris and made no bones about it. She used to quarrel with him, call him a played-out fool, and lock herself away from him for days. In a way I don't blame her. You know he wasn't a husband to her, and couldn't be. He had no business to marry a bonfire like Becky; and on her part, she was in the wrong to marry him. Well, there was the funeral, and we all did everything we could for her, humoring and petting her in every way. Then in a moment she blew up because a man from Chicago who had come to the funeral asked me to walk in the country with him for a way, and I did. She pretended and said that I was commencing a romance over the dead body of her daddy, and she wouldn't tolerate it. Such hypocrisy! considering that she was carrying on a romance with Julian Delaher there in the mountains while her daddy was ill, and even after he was dead back west. And so I simply packed and came away. But before that something happened. Did you ever see the will that Mr. Norris left?"

"Yes."

"Well, she had it read in our presence, and I don't know why. Sometimes, I think Becky is just a little stupid, and misses some of the fine points. At any rate, I don't get her purpose, and even at the last the purpose seems to be absent. So the will was read, and when I saw that Mr. Norris hadn't even left Becky that house by the Rock River which he really built for her, and at her request, she designed it, too, I looked at Becky to see how she was taking it. She was looking down very reverent

of face, very grave. She didn't get the house, she didn't get anything but an income as he first drew the will, and before he made the codicil. Now you are a lawyer, and I'd like to ask you, why Mr. Norris made his will, and on the same day made a codicil to the will?"

"I'd like to ask you why, if you know. I have often wondered about that. It's not a law question, but a human motive question."

"Well, he made the will giving her only an income, and the reason he did that he was afraid that fortune hunters would be after Becky. But while we were in the mountains, and just a few days before Mr. Norris died, she told me that he had found some of the letters that Julian Delaher was writing her, all beginning, 'Golden Girl', and that she had had a time in extricating herself. She told Mr. Norris that they were copies of letters which were written to a friend of hers, and which she had borrowed to work into a story she was writing. Becky was always going to write a great novel and she had Mr. Norris believing that she could do it. These letters were all typewritten and no signature; for Becky while always giving herself away, is always up to all sorts of secretive tricks, as you probably know."

"Yes, I do."

"Now, whether the finding of the letters made him make the will as he first made it, I don't know. But this is what happened when Becky discovered what he had done. He had left the will in a drawer. He was home sick at the time, it was about two years before he died. Well, Becky was looking through this drawer and she found the will and read it, and she went into a storm of rage. She simply forced Mr. Norris to make that codicil

and give her one third of his property absolutely, as well as the income from all of it for her life. She told me all about it; and when we were in the mountains she was afraid that he might change his will, or might have done so before then. She was always in terror lest Mr. Norris should hear of Delaher."

"Tell me, Mrs. Lyman, what was the secret of that Delaher affair? He is just a fop, a nothing. Nice looking and all that."

"That's all he is. But he has a fascination for Becky and always has had. Not in the way you did. For I want to be fair, if Becky ever loved anyone it was you. When your letters used to come she would kiss them and press them to her cheeks. She loved you, she loves you now."

"Oh, if it were only true!"

"Oh, if it were only not true. She is not for you. I am your friend and want to see you happy and successful. But let's be fair to Becky; she knew Delaher before she knew you; and she had never had a man in her life, not a real man, before she knew you. You were strong and young and gifted, you are I mean; and she knew Delaher was not in your class. At the same time she admired Delaher in a physical way, and once a romance is started it goes on until it wears out or is weaned; and when she came on to New York and was separated from you and Delaher came to her, the flame kindled again. And one fault with you men is that you do not seem to understand that women are just like men with the same desires and passions, and I venture that you could slip back into an old flame if you were separated from Becky or half mad at

her, or were in some way tempted, particularly if the woman was pretty and alluring."

Kirby thought at once of the Swedish beauty he had met coming east the summer before, and of his present attitude toward Charlotte, and he nodded an assent to this suggestion.

"So you see why Mr. Norris made the will and the codicil the same day. A man could scarcely change his mind in so short a space of time unless he was helped to do so, . . . but changing the subject, are you coming to my dance?"

"I believe I shall . . . thank you."

"Yes, do come. I want you to meet Rene. She and her husband will take you about and bring you into contact with some interesting people; and pretty soon you will find yourself a New Yorker, and very happy here. And Becky will fade out like a dream."

"I wanted to ask you: how did Delaher come out? Did he get out of that trouble he was in? I heard no more about it."

"I think he did. But I haven't invited him to my dance. He was here to dinner that time you came on to New York about your book. I thought he would do for a dinner guest; for then I didn't know you, and I was curious to place side by side two men whom Becky admired. But I don't want him about me any more. And I should think Becky would be done with him, too."

"I believe that trouble of his partly accounted for her illness and flight."

Mr. Lyman came in now, and took a seat before the fire, offered Kirby a fresh cigar, and asked the two of them if they had talked Becky out. He knew that

Evelyn wanted to brace Kirby to the separation that had come between him and Becky, and had conveniently gone out to give her the opportunity to talk freely to Kirby. Then Kirby left, promising to come to the dance.

He was very happy as the time arrived that he had accepted Evelyn's invitation. He would forget at times and then remember with vividness what can be made of life by replenishing its interests with new personalities, in finding fresh admirations and storehouses of living in people who have fared in other walks of life.

"You are going to meet one of the most interesting men of your life tonight my dear," Evelyn said to Rene, and she described Kirby a little, saying that he was a man from the West who was starting to live in New York. But she did not mention Becky's name, conceiving that it was the part of real goodness not to blur Kirby's possible friendship with Rene, with a history that might prove disharmonious with it.

Rene was tall and graceful, gray eyed, with an abundance of rich brown hair, and a musical voice that rippled words from one of the most expressive of mouths. She and Kirby became friends at once. "Hello, Skeet," she said stretching both her hands to him, for Evelyn had told her his nickname. The ball room on the top floor would accommodate about fifty people with one of the best floors for dancing; and Kirby, though somewhat out of practice, entered at once into the gaiety; choosing first Evelyn and then turning to Rene, with whom he danced again and again, sometimes taking her from her husband or some other partner as she passed him on the floor. He became very spirited and gay and kept Rene in a gale of laughter with his stories and odd remarks. He

was a new type to Rene, because of his western accent and locutions, and his frank easy way, partly due to his strong individuality and partly to his contact and experience with all sorts of people. Dancing had become the rage now, and mystical souls feared that it foreshadowed war. There had always been dancing in the world's history before a war. It expressed something deeper in man than instinct, this preparation in psychology for war, and in the inauguration of the war itself. It was as if the Life Force itself determined that too many people would be in the world if some of them were not killed off; while man acting out this fundamental need for decimation moved toward it not knowing why, thinking that it was to avenge slighted national honor, or to win liberty, or to vindicate truth. All the while it was a spirit moving in the depths below the deeps, a cosmic and automatic mechanism starting its wheels at the time that the eccentric of the great engine reached a certain position, that position itself being determined by gears and purposes more recondite still. Kirby thought that war could never be abolished; for even if men were brought to the intelligence and the mercy of settling their national disputes by arbitration,—and could that be while there was hunger and the will to life?—still what could control this blind automatism which, to prevent the world from becoming over populated, set the forces of thinning out peoples to work at the needful time with the very quality of Necessity itself? The very business of living in its daily paths and routines might be the automatic working of this eyeless energy, controlling below will and emotion and taste and even instinct the movements of these insects called men; even as insects are in being because of

this impersonal and unthinking force. And was it not this that had brought him to this dance and to the lambent and intuitive arms of Rene Aldrich? This gay and baroque music, so expressive of this period of America, this rattling syncopation, this medley of echoes of the vast and disordered and variegated life of America, evoked these speculations from the far down subliminal strata of Kirby's imagination; and the lithe back of Rene Aldrich, her sinuous adaptation to his body and his movements, the soft caressments of her yielding breasts, and the sweet scent of her breath from lips parted in laughter and in unfeigned tenderness, mingled their influences with the intoxication of the music's rhythm and the metrical harmony of their feet.

Kirby took new strength and sanity in this contact with a woman as vital and spiritually innocent and joyous as Rene Aldrich. As he was dancing it came to him that only the happy, the contented, the successful can be noble, forgiving, amiable and understanding and therefore just; while the disappointed, the defeated must necessarily think of their wrongs, and strive to forgive, instead of yielding forgiveness as the sun gives light; and must hence be exercised in the doing of good things with impatience and depression and cloudiness of spirit as concomitants. But this music which electrified and exalted his faculties and made him larger of mind, called to his reflections the wisdom of the Greeks who prescribed music and gymnastics for the development of the soul. Had he not known what the body can bring out of the mind in his labors with his hands on the farm in Illinois, and in his life at the cabin on the Rock River? And now to dance, which was gymnastics, and to this music which was an expression

of some Muse, perhaps Thalia, was to come into possession of powers which he had forgotten he had in these months of brooding about Becky Norris, and about the state of his life threatened with poverty, and actually encompassed by loneliness and by small things. . .

Then as he went about the ballroom he saw Evelyn from time to time, who was dancing or standing, but always observing him, and sometimes smiling a salutation to him, for she had rather consciously intended that this dance and her drawing him into the circle of her life should cure him of Becky Norris. Kirby was thinking now not of this, but of Becky in her loveliness, her tender association with him, and in the largeness of his mood he did not blame her for her irritable ways, her sharp tongue. Had she not endured enough to sour the soul of an angel? Who knew her as he did? Bob Hayden, Evelyn, others indirectly had appraised Becky. But does anyone know the beloved one as the lover knows her? And hence the folly of taking the judgment of the outsider, which has the effect of hypnotizing one into acting toward the loved one as they would act toward her with their vision of her, and not as the lover would act toward her if left uninfluenced by such disturbing minds. Suppose Becky had gone away, never to return . . . ah, still he had the memory of her beauty and her graciousness . . . and perhaps she would come to him again. In this hour of happiness and balance he felt strong enough to draw her back to him by the sheer power of a clear spirit and the passion of a heart that has given itself to beautiful things. What was Rene taking from this mood of his? Surely not its actual thought and words, but surely no less its emotional energy; for she was responding to his caresses; and once at the

finish of a dance they sat in a little retiring place to have an ice, and it was then that she gave him her lips, so happily and with such spirit that he folded her to him and held her gently, saying with bright elation: "How lovely you are."

All the while Harold Aldrich was dancing with Evelyn, or some one else, though he took Rene for a partner too once or twice. But he could not be oblivious of the interest which was thriving between her and Kirby. Rene had said to Kirby: "Harold and I are such good friends. He is a dear, and we never interfere in any way with each other, though we really have no secrets from each other, so far as that is concerned. You know I believe there might be a realm or group of people where every one loved every one else."

"Free love?"

"Oh, please don't use that horrid word, Skeet. It has such shabby associations. Sometimes, I think love is just desire, but when I see that desire is excited and sustained by admirable qualities, beauty of mind and body, I am not so sure."

"Still, love is not an abstract or separate thing from the properties which arouse it, nor from the satisfactions it brings after it is aroused. We love to have our egos fed, all of us. We love devotion, praise, keen valuations of our natures, and all that. And yet we are always living and dreaming as if love were an abstract thing, like one of the ideas of Plato."

"You mean the artists are."

"Yes, the artists. And in regard to your group where every one loved every one else, the idea would quickly soil

in the use: there would be jealousies, and meannesses and hatreds."

"Of course, we with these bodies to carry out what the heart dreams could never do it; still I love to think of it. Quite frankly, Harold would allow me to have some one live with us that I cared for."

"That is because he doesn't care so much, I fear."

"Well, we're over the stage of selfish love with each other; and besides he loves some one, and I have done the same."

"You have done the same . . . then it's over."

"Oh, yes, except for the fact that we are good friends."

"I cannot, having been your lover,
Stoop to become your friend."

"It is a dead thing; or else if there is any love or longing left, professed friendship is a sort of hypocrisy. The poet whoever it is that you quote is right."

Then Kirby, because Rene had given him something of her confidence, and because he had almost fallen in the way of taking the opinion of Becky from understanding people that he met, told her in an hypothetical case of Becky, stating it as the experience of some one he knew.

"That woman is a perfect dub, Skeet, a nothing, a half artist, and half goddess. She wants to keep a reputation as a virtuous woman; and yet she imperils it on the meretricious level of living at the Ritzdorf under the conditions that you describe. Whereas she denies a frank and beautiful relationship which the artists would honor her for maintaining, for fear of the conventional people. She hasn't good sense, a queer half and half, and what I

call an immoral woman in every sense. The poor girl who is not gifted, who fears to lose her bread through scandal is a more admirable person than the rich woman who fears to lose her social position through scandal. For what is social position? It is about the cheapest and most ridiculous thing in this world and behind it all sorts of cheap adulteries, and lustful escapades are carried on. I hate all this."

"So do I, and thanks for saying so."

"Oh, we would go on famously . . . you and I."

Harold now came around the corner where Rene and Kirby were talking. "Oh," exclaimed Rene, "Come and sit with us, Harold, we are having a wonderful talk, and you can help us decide things." She took his hand, and went on: "I have been telling Mr. Kirby about you and me, what good friends we are. We have been talking about love."

"She's a great girl, isn't she?" said the husband, and he lifted her lovely hand to his lips and planted a kiss upon it. "Why don't we take Mr. Kirby to the Walters' tomorrow night?"

"Will you go?" asked Rene.

"What is it?"

"Just a gay supper with lots of talk, and a chance for you to see one of the prettiest women in New York, young, too, about thirty, the girl Byrne Walters married two years ago, and he is twenty years older than she is. He has a lot of new pictures that we want to see; and you will enjoy them too; and Francine, that's the wife, will be delighted to have you. I'll call her up and tell her we are going to bring you. Meet us at the Brevoort at seven, if you'll go."

"I'd love to do that."

They walked together back to the ballroom, and after another dance, made ready to go. Evelyn came to Kirby and said: "Well, you have had a good time."

"A wonderful time."

"And I see that you and Rene have become friends. I'm so glad. Now do you come again, whenever you can . . . and you know . . . forget." Forget! The word hurt Kirby even while he knew the wisdom that it expressed. He nodded his head and smiled. "Are you going with them tomorrow night, to the Walters'?"

"Yes. And you?"

"I am."

"How nice . . . very well, we'll meet there." And they said good night.

The Walters lived in an artist's apartment in Ninth Street, located on the top floor. There was one large room provided with a skylight, and two bedrooms, beside a little kitchen. Byrne was showing his pictures to the men, while Evelyn, Francine and Rene prepared the meal, the table being spread near the skylight, for which Kirby had brought a little bouquet. Some of the pictures had been painted in Spain recently when Byrne and Francine were abroad on their honeymoon, and others were American scenes, some of wooded hills, and some of fields of wheat, standing against a background of rich slopes of grass. With the American pictures Kirby was enthralled. He knew them, and appreciated the artists' genius in selecting their subjects; and he studied them long and with loving interest. "If I ever do anything in a creative way," he said, "I'd like to interpret America, its people, its spirit, its material richness, which some-

how more and more I believe will develop some sort of a wonderful culture."

"Well," said Byrne, "A subject is a subject, and belongs to the painter or writer who can do it. I don't believe in sticking to America just for patriotic reasons, so to speak; but always, of course, for artistic reasons if they obtain. I was raised out in Ohio, and that accounts for these pictures of the fields and so forth. But when I go to Spain, the beauty of that country comes to me, and I paint it . . . I don't know how well."

"I think very well," said Kirby.

"Yes, they are wonderful," added Harold.

"As for me," Kirby went on, "I should be wondering if I wrote of France or England how much of the intimate spirit of the subject, acquired from living with the thing, I should put into the work. Perhaps I am provincial and patriotic after all."

"Well, be that then," said Byrne. "There is work to be done along that line too. The rest of us will check against you."

"One thing I note here," commented Kirby, "is this sky, a kind of slate colored sky, which I have seen so often on cloudless days in late June when the heat made the corn wilt and sleep, and the oats were growing golden from the intense rays of the sun."

"That was painted in Ohio on just such a day. But I think we'd better shake up the drinks now, for that steak smells as if it were about done, and the girls will be calling us to the feast."

"What about the cocktails, Byrne?" called Francine, coming to the door of the kitchen and looking in upon the men. She was a picture of joyousness with her

bright violet eyes and her ruddy hair and her rich but virginal bosom. Then Evelyn and Rene crowded to the door to see what the men were doing, and Kirby's heart was full of delight. How beautiful life can be, he thought and what charm women add to it!

"I think Mr. Kirby is wonderful," said Francine to Evelyn, as they turned back into the kitchen. "Isn't he a handsome and well set up male. What does he do?"

"He is going to be a writer," answered Evelyn.

"He looks the part."

"He is a writer now," said Rene with an air of championship. Then the women took up the steak and the salad and the vegetables and bore them to the table. The cocktails were now prepared and they drank to each other, and sat down amid laughter which continued during the meal, with cigarettes and coffee at the end. Kirby was very happy. It was past midnight when the party broke up, and Kirby escorted Evelyn to her home, as Mr. Lyman could not come with her; and indeed did not fancy evenings of this sort, though allowing Evelyn to have them when she wished.

Before Rene returned to Baltimore Kirby saw her on several occasions, once at breakfast, where they were very merry, once for a ride on the bus and a walk through the park. They had talked over their lives to a large extent, and their experiences. Rene knew that Kirby's hypothetical story was his own, and on his part he divined the truth about her, which was that she had separated from a lover, and for the time was without an interest, while her husband was continuing an affair, which Rene resented because she thought the woman was not worth her husband's interest. In speaking of the separations of lovers

she had said: "These separations are death in life, the end of life, because they discard the substance, the medium which has been created for daily living. All the notes, the messages, the meetings, the kisses, the glad pressure of hands after a day or two of absence; and then this nothingness, in which there are no notes, no messages, no meetings. Oh it is really death, but death upon which the dead are forced to gaze with their own eyes."

These words went through Kirby's heart like a knife, for he understood them so fully. And as he looked at Rene he felt that he might create the life of love again through her . . . but there was her husband which offended his æsthetics, then there was her distance from him in Baltimore; and there was the prospect ahead of a parting some time with her, this end that comes always, he thought. He was not hearty enough of spirit to embark upon this adventure which Rene so plainly invited him to share with her. How gracious, and wise and free she was; how understanding of him! Perhaps she would be the wife for him . . . perhaps; and yet what would she be after having been the wife of Harold? There would be the breaking of her life with her husband, no matter how freely he would surrender her.

But always there are doors to be opened when the heart would find a place of rest and delight. In the case of Charlotte she had surely been another's, she had been the sweetheart of her employer, whoever he was. And that had to be overcome, or forgotten, and would it leave a trace of some sort in their lives, if she came to New York and cast her life with his? Yet, in spite of Rene's gifted and aristocratic womanhood, Charlotte seemed to Kirby even as he sat in the spell of Rene's presence, the prefer-

able fate for him, the freer life for that career of concentration and loneliness which he intuitively felt belonged to his nature. The world should not shrink away from him, he would not shrink away from the world, yet he would be free from the anxiety of joy, anger and fear, and become pure, untroubled, detached from pleasures and pains, even while living them through. The wisdom of the great Hindu hymns, constantly went through his mind; as well as the beauty of the Greek soul which expressed itself in humanism, simplicity, balance and measure, naturalism, idealism, patience, joy, fellowship, and the devotion to the art of living.

Mr. Aldrich had gone back to Baltimore leaving Rene to her own devices in New York, and believing that she and Kirby had made some sort of a compact with each other. But these two only played and talked; and Rene wondered about Kirby, seeing that she had signified to him, if his eye were at all practiced, that she was his for the taking. Ah! this old love of his. It would not let him be free to have delight with her. So she thought. And when he took her to the station, as they were passing through the gallery where there were shops, she stepped into a flower store and brought a blossom to him, fastening it in his buttonhole, and looking into his eyes with such wistful and tender understanding that Kirby's heart trembled with delight. She gave him her lips, then inviting him to come to Baltimore, yes, come and stay at their house for as long as he could, she turned and disappeared among the crowds filing toward the train.

CHAPTER XIX

These intolerable days at that office! The hours and hours of reading! The face of Mitford, as he thrust himself at the door, and talked of trivial things; and the evenings when Mitford came in for the habitual drink of whisky. This was the vice of alcohol: to rely upon it, to wait for the time when it was to be taken, and not shared amid laughter and joy as at the party at the Walters', but in this office, barren and dull, and with Mitford, a sort of rancid waste of defeated life. Why could not Kirby extricate himself from this ignominy of loafing, these days of no profit except for the reading which he did? And yet the Fates might be doing something with him and to some end. Perhaps he was learning patience and fortitude, and what it is to have shame of soul and regret for the past; and perhaps he was exploring all sorts of fastnesses of spirit, from which he might return wise; but ruined or greatly injured through the suffering by which he was to learn these secrets of the soul.

Something of a mystical logic permeated his thinking even at its darkest. One day he brought forth the diaries that he had kept year after year. How terrible it was to look back upon the thousands of days that had been his! Day after day of nothingness and waiting; and the seasons passing and the years passing, and all the while, for the most part, this nothingness! Who said that life was

just the killing of time? It had been so with Kirby, strive as he would.

And these human beings who thought life important because they had labored and procured the making of laws, the regulation of street car fares and operation, the recasting of systems of taxation, the saving of souls in religious revivals! Why could they not see through the illusion of the nothingness in which they lived and labored?

He often looked down upon the wriggling crowds in the streets far below. If they could only see themselves as he saw them!

If he only had a place to live, with a shelf for books, a fireplace, a stove upon which to cook what he relished! Why could he not leave this hotel? A thousand plans swarmed through his mind from day to day. He always awoke with something fresh in the way of a scheme to lift his life out of the rut into which it had fallen. He would go back to the country; but if he did how would he support himself? On the other hand, what was he doing here to support himself? Nothing at all! For outside of the doctor case which Cavette Errant had brought him, and his bill for the services in that was never paid, nothing had come to him but one piece of work from Mr. Kennedy, where the fee was $200. And so his bank account was growing smaller. If he should descend to accepting help from Charlotte! That never could be: though now he could understand an exigency in which a man would take money from a woman. He felt and imagined ahead into that phase of failure, even if he never actually participated in it. Cavette Errant! he was always a degradation to Kirby, and to have him so at this pass of life. For Errant knew that he was in money

straits, yet he would seek him out and take his labor and his time with a client who didn't pay. Cavette Errant! why was he never to be done with him?

Charlotte was coming at last. Kirby had sent her money for the railroad fare, and was preparing to maintain her until she could find something to do. But after he knew that she was really on her way he wondered why he had prevailed upon her to leave Chicago. The plan had seemed true in one phase of his thinking, on certain days when life looked as if he should fashion it with reference to simple things, and to the simple association of a woman like Charlotte. But on other days, when life seemed more complex, and mystery and beauty called to him, and faces peered at him like Rene's and Evelyn's and Francine's, never to forget Becky's, he felt a little sickness that this dreaming and idealizing nature of his had led him to the bringing of Charlotte to New York. There were women in abundance here. And what of Charlotte and the man who had taken her earnings to pay the rent of his office? What would she bring to him as an effect out of causes developed between her and that man back in Chicago? Sometimes he wished that he was at the cabin on the Rock River. But after all that could not be, because of his memory of Becky, with whom that place was inseparably associated. So many doors of life closed on him! Once he thought of a rich man in St. Louis, a friend of Bob Hayden's, who had a place in the Thousand Islands. He wrote to this millionaire, asking if the place was for rent; and the reply came that it had not been occupied for a long while; but if Kirby wanted to use it he was welcome to it, and without rent. But what would

Kirby do there? How would he make a living there? Surely he veered about, and accomplished nothing.

But soon his mother was coming to America. She was sailing from Italy at last and her presence would make some difference with his life.

The night before Charlotte arrived, Kirby had dinner with Evelyn. She had telephoned him saying that they would have a very cosy time, just by themselves, and that she had received a letter which she wished to show him, from a friend who was on the boat with Becky, bound for Tokio.

"Oh, how nice it is to see you again," said Evelyn. She had entered the hall just as he rang, and greeted him as she was standing at the foot of the stair; while the butler waited deferentially for him to pass. Mr. Lyman was out for the evening; and Evelyn's children had gone to a theatre dinner and party with their governess; so that they had everything quite to themselves.

"I have a friend named Beatrice Bond, a newspaper woman, who is taking a trip around the world, and she has written me a letter that I want you to read . . . all about a lot of things, and about Becky. And I don't know that Beatrice is aware of the fact that Becky and I were schoolmates, and that our association was once so intimate. Anyway she gives a wonderful picture of Becky, and so true to life. Let's wait till we finish dinner before I get her letter; for there are other things I want to talk to you about while we dine. Don't think that I am untrue to anything that ever was between Becky and me. I think so much of you, and prize your future so highly, that I want you to have your mind set at rest."

"I understand."

When they had finished dinner Evelyn got the letter from her friend and handed it to Kirby to read. "Read it out loud to me, I want to hear it again, and get the effect of it from a spoken voice . . . yours, in fact." And Kirby read it:

"Dear Evelyn:

I shall make one letter do for a long while; and perhaps it will be so long that you will be glad. I have rested and written some for my magazine; but of course between San Francisco and Honolulu, and then between there and Tokio, there was nothing else to do, except study the queer humans one always finds on a trip like this. Quite the most thrilling thing has been a certain Becky Norris, who is traveling with an old lady named Constance Spellman, who sits on the deck and reads Hindu hymns, with Becky beside her in state, when the latter is not parading with the captain of the boat, or visiting in his room. There was great excitement when Becky embarked. No one knew her, then; but she came loaded down with flowers and gifts, carefully handled by her maid, and looked after with pride by Constance. Also followed by two swains, whom she kissed as she stepped on the gangplank, her face lighted with radiant smiles. She is a pretty woman, with her ruddy hair and vivacious manner. We were all wondering about her. She went to the most elaborate and expensive suite on the boat, and began at once to oscillate between a certain hoydenish familiarity of manner with those that she became acquainted with, the captain among the rest, and a very top-lofty reserve when she thought it right, or took the whim to assert her noblesse oblige, such as it is. She got

a seat at the captain's table, at his right hand at that; and as I did, too, we became acquainted. She made a regular set for me, saying that she was a writer herself and had published one book that sold four thousand copies, and had made a contract with a New York publisher for the publication of five books, for which she received $3,000 advance royalties. Strictly speaking she didn't say this to me, but I overheard Constance, also at the captain's table, tell the captain this stuff, while Becky smiled in a self satisfied way. The captain is red faced and good-hearted, a good captain, but not a reading man or on to the ways, and of course he didn't know any better than to swallow this story. Then I thought I'd have some fun, seeing that she was seeking me out, and I began to talk to her about her good luck, to congratulate her and all that. And she fell for me. She brought forth her manuscripts, which I praised and that won her, and made her talk freely. She writes the most inane stuff that I have ever read, and as for her reading she knows nothing except as a society woman might pick up information from scholarly men with whom she is associated. She talked to me of Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea, which I tackled once, without getting such a lot out of it, which I told her, asking her to tell me what it meant to her. 'Just Space and Time' she said blandly, and with just a little patronization of me. She didn't know a thing about Schopenhauer. Speaking of scholarly men, this Becky woman had letters from two or three of the most noted men in England, one of them a great translator of philosophical books, who was writing her about philosophy . . . but you never can tell about these men. They get all sorts of hopes of marriage and all that,

and leisure if they marry a rich woman; and I fancy she would have a way of indicating to a correspondent, like a poor scholar, that she has money. Well, I have had a lot of fun with Becky, without her knowing it. She is slick as glass, but as transparent too; and flattery completely disarms her. To describe her: there are times when she looks as mild and innocent as a little girl, and there are times when she has the face of a hardened veteran of the game. Of which speaking we were up in the captain's room the other night; and Becky has a way of kissing all the men, which is her slick way of denying that there is anything between her and any of them. I mention this party because of something that happened which I shall never forget. Becky came in after we all were there, giggling and trying to make an impression, as usual. She kissed the men all around, but when she came to the captain, he leaned toward her in a sort of chivalrous way as if he could not expect the favor that was being bestowed upon him, yet with an amorous look in his eyes which were staring into Becky's eyes. But it was Becky's look that knocked me over. Her eyes turned right and left as her lips were in contact with the captain's—something as a fish's does when seen in a bowl as it swims past another fish; and then I became intuitive to something passing through her entire body, just as one observes the intense finalities of Salome's ecstasy when dancing with the head of John the Baptist . . . you know what I mean. Well, then we sat down and began to have some wine, which the captain had in his room; and Becky got very gay and then at times lapsed into seriousness and began to talk of her daddy. And I took it all in, for it was a study: I think I shall write a story about this

queer, half neurotic woman; and this letter is a sort of practice sketch."

The letter then passed to other things, and when Kirby saw this he held it calmly for a moment and then handed it back to Evelyn with the remark: "Does your correspondent know that you know Becky?"

"As I said before, I don't know. But she is a voluminous writer of letters and before this has written me about people that she met on trips here and there. . . I show you this letter for the good it will do you. For frankly, I would do anything in the world for you, I feel so keenly the sorrow that Becky has given you, while not understanding how she could wind herself about you so inextricably."

"You yourself have explained it."

"How?"

"Why, when you told about her way with the singer to whom she gave the shawl. And there is this thing about human beings: they come to you in one guise and you accept them and love them; and then they change into some other self of their selves, like a landscape that is one thing of beauty when you first see it, then something weird or tasteless or forbidding on later view. In Becky's case she was an angel at first, and then little things began to show themselves in her nature . . . but of all this you know."

"Yes," said Evelyn, "I know all about it. And I want to tell you that I am proud of you for the way you are getting hold of yourself. It will all come out right at last. You are going to have lots of friends here, and you will be prosperous here; and some time if you want to marry, some nice girl will come along, and make you happy. All

that I have done and said to you has been with the idea of helping you."

"I know it."

"Of course it's true. And I have said some things against my sense of loyalty; for I couldn't know Becky so long without having something like that in my heart. But I am your friend, too. And in helping you I am not harming her."

"No, because you couldn't make my judgment more against her than it has been. And since she doesn't want me, what difference how much I make up my mind against her? So thanks to you, Evelyn! This letter tonight rings true, and helps to pack my mind with resolution. I must go now."

"Do come back . . . often . . . whenever you feel like it. This house is always open to you, and with affection that I hope will help you. Go down to see Rene, she can do much for you. There is no poison in her, I am sure of that."

Kirby went to a buffet near at hand on his way to the hotel, and sat at one of the tables, sipping beer and thinking. Around him were the late habitués of this place, men and women, drinking and feeding and talking. What a shadow he was to them! He had a habit of carrying envelopes and letters in his pocket, sometimes for months after he had received them; because he often jotted upon them addresses and memoranda, and thoughts for stories or poems. And so he took out of his pockets these papers, and was looking them over while sipping the beer. It was a way of continuing the memory of other days and other states of thought; and thus often proved a relief to the intensity of present emotions. He found now a folded

sheet of paper with many notes upon it, half erased by the wear in his pocket; but spreading it out, his eyes fell upon a poem which he had written once to Becky. He had sat opposite to her on an occasion, when suddenly she turned upon him a look of such elfin wonder that his heart sank into a slow rhythm under the spell of her fascination. He had thus tried to preserve that moment in a poem. And here in this buffet after this evening with Evelyn, and the revelation of the letter written to her, he recreated Becky as she was when she looked at him, in a reading of his poem:

The table was a tulip bed of candle sticks,
Drifting gold like leaves over the icicles
Of silver, and a lapping hearth was keeping
The merriment of the room in a bright security,

Against the whirling snow upon the window panes,
And the whine of wind shut from their jollity.
They two sat face to face amid the lightness
Of feasting, and the talk of casual nothingness:

Silent as clouds of snow poised in immensity
At midnight, flashing lightning like quick silver
Across a void of starless blue, their glancing
Came intermittently, shown and veiled like lightning.

Until at once her steady look made luminate
Her eyes tranced in concentered admiration:
As the moon swims into the void, and like a censer
Hangs motionless and blots with staring splendor

The evanescent blues, and ethereal mirrorings
Beaconed from cloud to cloud. So now her vision
Searched him with light, and found him, and he answered
Opening through eyes the labyrinth to his passion.

He will never forget her eyes' light in that moment,
Nor she forget the passion which it kindled.
There amid guests, who saw not for the feasting,
Flame had answered to flame across the abysses!

So he read the poem he had written long ago, and smiled at himself! She had given him this look; she had also kissed the captain, in the way Evelyn's correspondent had described. He smiled again, and looked over the crowd in the room. He drank the beer which was brought him. He put the poem back in his pocket. After a time he arose and left the buffet. He walked briskly and in composure of mind to his hotel. He went to bed and slept. Charlotte was arriving tomorrow.

CHAPTER XX

CHARLOTTE stepped from the train, and smiled joyously at Kirby, who received her with unconcealed gladness. She was wearing an attractive dress which she had managed to buy for the trip; and joyous expectation over the new life ahead of her was written in her buoyant expression. As she did not know where she was going she had not given her baggage check to the expressman, but now she handed it to Kirby, who said, "You'd better come to my hotel, anyway for a while."

What her life was to be remained to be seen; and she was content to let it unfold gradually.

She had puzzled however a little as to Kirby's plans. How did his mind happen to turn to her when he could find many women to admire in New York? Kirby's idea was so simple that it rather baffled Charlotte, though she expected that he would try to make her his sweetheart. If that was to be, there should be no one beside herself in his life. She had made up her mind to that. On his part he planned to do for her and to help her; and further if his mother bought the place on Long Island to take her there, if he could bring his mother to that arrangement. He had no idea of marrying Charlotte; though he was persuaded that if he took a wife it should be some woman like Charlotte who had been in the business world, and had acquired there the knowledge of life and of people,

which only such an experience brings to a woman. Of these things he had thought over and over; and the advice of Bob Hayden had gone deeply into his reflections. In any case he would be perfectly frank and fair with Charlotte. She was a woman and knew her mind, and she knew life. It only remained for him not to make her promises that he did not intend to fulfill. On the other hand, Charlotte was glad to be in New York; for she had decided to take this step and make this change in her life, whether it was to be in association with Kirby or not.

She went with him to the hotel, and he got a room for her. As soon as she could make a temporary settlement they set off for Long Beach. As a test he stood at her door while she was preparing to leave with him, and half entered, once to look at a book which she took from her bag, which she had read on the train. "You look like you were glad to see me," she said with a gay smile. "I am," he responded, and he took her by both arms, then framed her cheeks between his hands and kissed her boyishly. He had brought her to New York, but, on the other hand, she could shift for herself; she was glad of the chance to come; and if they did not harmonize she would of her own will pass along and make life for herself.

Everything about the city was new to Charlotte; and she was visibly delighted. They went to the station to take the train to Long Beach. When they arrived they walked by the shore, resting at times in shady places under the board walk that fronted the water. Kirby was interested to have Charlotte tell him fully about her friendship with the man who had taken her money; for as he was making up his mind how to adventure with her while he sat with her and observed her beauty, and

recalled her capable and womanly ways, he wanted to be sure that this man no longer had a part in her life. Whatever feeling he ever might have for her would have to be a growth. He had thought that out; but also in this after flame of his passion for Becky it was impossible for him to give love to Charlotte or to any woman. He would not force himself into an affection. He saw the danger that had come to Robert Burns, which had wrecked the love nature of that greatly gifted man, who had gone through the swift years that were his deluding himself that he was experiencing the kind of love for which he sought in vain, and who had ended life with mechanical passions, revenging the love that he had idealized and failed to win. Kirby sensed in himself a capacity for loving which no single woman could satisfy, unless it were Becky. He had given his heart to her fully and spontaneously, and that was the terrible tragedy of its defeat.

But if he was bent upon taking what Charlotte had to give, what was he willing to give her in return? He would be a good friend to her; he would give her opportunity for living, he would help her; admiration might turn to affection, and desire to a bond of something akin to love. She would never disturb him, tantalize him, distract his powers. But wouldn't she, like any other woman, reduce his vitality in these ways if his heart became involved? And what was she expecting from him? In any case she was a safer trial than Rene Aldrich, who was closer to his station in life and his attainments. Rene would not do. He had resolutely faced down a rising passion for her.

Charlotte had the greatest admiration for Kirby, but she did not love him. She had had that association with

him as his secretary which gave her an insight into his moods, his ideals; and she fully appreciated his gifts, and her heart was warmed by his generous nature. She knew that he had not sent for her for nothing; but what the developments were to be she was content to leave to time. She was quite capable of taking care of herself; and misfortune in love had matured her nature to a certain wisdom and deftness. She had loved one man when she was just turned twenty-three, and had given herself to him in the expectation of marrying him; but he was already married and could not get free. At last the affair broke down. Then she married a man, and was divorced from him; and a little later returned to her first love in a casual way, in an ineffectual fanning of the old flame; and then she had come to the man who used her, after she had been Kirby's secretary. Kirby knew none of this; only that she had been in this association which he thought so unfair to her womanhood. It was of this that Kirby began to talk as they sat under the shade of the boardwalk.

"So you fully settled with your man, Charlotte?"

"Yes, as far as it could be."

"What do you mean?"

She looked off across the water, and for the thousandth time Kirby saw that woman trait which remains silent and compels repeated questions to extract the truth. He pressed the question, "What do you mean?" and Charlotte said, "Well, he had nothing and what could he do?"

"How did you ever happen to get in with such a man?"

"I went to work for him, and he got me interested in his investments, and I thought I could make some money, and so I put my wages in . . . "

"You mean gave them to him?"

"Yes."

"And then it got so bad that you were out for money to pay the office rent?"

"Yes."

"Well, you must have thought a lot of him."

"As a friend. He was always a friend."

"A friend!"

"You don't believe that."

"I hate the word friend when used in such a way."

"Why?"

"Oh, it's a blind. And if I had thought that you would use the money that way instead of for yourself, I shouldn't have given it to you."

"Well, I repaid it."

"Out of your own money?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll give it back to you, and do you buy you something with it in New York. But the thing is, are you now done with this man?"

"I don't expect to see him."

"Do you expect to hear from him?"

"No."

"Or write to him?"

"No."

"Has he got any claim on your interest?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because, quite frankly, I have in mind certain plans for you, and why should I make them and carry them out if you are still interested in him?"

"He couldn't possibly interfere with that."

"Well, then definitely you are not in love with him."

"I am not."

"But this giving of your money to him?"

"Well, I don't think that was so remarkable. It came about in just the way that I have told you, and I would do that for anyone under the same circumstances."

"For me perhaps."

"What a question! Of course I would do it for you. You are a real man, and a good friend; and he a poor fellow and a weak proposition."

She looked at him and laughed good naturedly as much as to say that he was off the trail. But he was not so far off. He had concluded by now that this man and Charlotte had been lovers of some sort. And with this in mind he said suggestively: "He was very handsome, wasn't he?"

"He is a handsome fellow . . . how did you know?"

"I heard so. And so . . . all right Charlotte." And he laughed.

"You are a knowing mind," she said, "More so than ever, and you were always keen enough. Have you asked me all the questions you wish to?"

"I think so."

"Well, then I think I'll ask you a few."

"Go ahead."

"What did you write me to come here for?"

"I wanted you here in the city with me."

"But there are lots of women here."

"None that I knew as I did you."

"But you could get acquainted."

"That takes time, and besides I might not have found anyone that I like as well as I do you."

"You always did like me, didn't you?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"When I was working for you you were good to me, and used to look at me as if you liked me. But you were married then; and afterward you split up or were splitting up, and I saw that there was some one else."

"No."

"Don't tell me that, you left your wife for another woman."

"On my word of honor I didn't."

"Well, that's the story back in Chicago, and even now I seem to see in your face and manner the influence of some one."

"What do you mean?"

"You've been hurt."

"Do I look that way?"

"Yes, and it explains why you sent for me."

"No, it doesn't."

"Well, you asked me a lot of questions and I am going to ask you one, anyway: haven't you parted with some one?"

"Yes."

"Are you done with that some one?"

"Yes . . . why?"

"Because when I went away from you to work with some one else I didn't want to go; and if I hadn't I'd never have got into that loss of my little money, and if I start to work for you again I don't want to get settled and be happy and then break up and look for another job."

"Well, Charlotte, it would be a farce for me to have you work for me now. I just sit in my office and read all day, and there wouldn't be anything for you to do. You couldn't stand it."

"Well. . . ."

"Oh, I'm going to see you through. Don't think that I'm up to anything. I really have a plan."

"What is it?"

"I'll tell you. My mother is returning from Europe in just a few days, and she is going to buy a place out on Long Island, and she wants me to live with her. I know that she wants me to help her with her business affairs; and that will finance me; and perhaps I'll go on with this office of mine . . . but I don't want her to see it; for if all goes well, I'll either open a good office or quit entirely. But this is what I want to bring about. . . ."

In an impulsive moment Kirby was about to tell Charlotte that he had planned to have her come and live with himself and his mother; and to bring this about by having his mother take her for a secretary; then it seemed to him premature to unfold this plan at this time and he checked himself.

"What do you want to bring about?" she asked searching his face.

"I was going to tell you, but I wanted to put it just right. It is like this, if my mother likes you, and I believe that she would, it would be very nice all around if you were my secretary again and business was going good."

"Oh!" exclaimed Charlotte, not comprehending just what he meant, if he meant anything.

"In the meanwhile I'll see you through; and we'll wait for developments. Let's go to that hotel there and have some food. Aren't you hungry?"

"I am starved."

They sat near an open window of the glassed veranda and looked out at the sea rolling in under the bright

light of this June day. Kirby was studying Charlotte from time to time. Surely she was very beautiful; and he began to think of the prodigality of nature which without reference to riches or gentle rearing, but amid poverty and anxieties about bread fashions these lovely specimens of human beings. Charlotte was just as beautiful as Becky; she had a stable and reliable mind which Becky didn't have; she had a kind heart which Becky varied with the most irritating petulance; she was self-sacrificing and thoughtful which Becky was not; she was experienced in life and honest of heart, which Becky was not.

The sea breeze blew in upon them, there was music far away in a corner among some palms, and Kirby looked at Charlotte and wondered if she could not solve his loneliness for him; if she were not the woman for him. It was with that idea that he had sent for her, and she had come, not trusting him so much as she was willing to explore the prospect, whatever it was. She was not looking for money, for she knew he didn't have any. What was it for himself that she wished? But he resolved that he would never speak a word of love to her until he felt love for her deeply and all through his heart; and he would never invite an expression of love from her until he could honor the gift. She had belonged to another man, but what of that? He had given himself wholly to Becky; and yet he knew that if life prospered his feeling for Charlotte that he could be as devoted to Charlotte as he had ever been to Becky. Could not Charlotte in spite of any affair that she had ever had be as fresh to his heart as she had ever been to the heart of some

precious lover? A surge of happiness went through him; for already he was feeling that Becky was fading out of his emotional life; and that by going on and living, and taking what these rich days of youth offered him, he could master himself. What delight to have before him the face of this vital and natural woman! To be with her as she looked upon the sea for the first time in her life! To give her that happiness! To know that although she was self reliant and not afraid of work, that her present delight was due in part to the fact that she was with him, and that she believed that he would rise again to strength; and would be her friend. She knew that he would not use her or deceive her, even if she was open to deception; and how could that be? If they became intimates and then he changed . . . well, that could be managed. But why would he not marry her? She was confident that she could be a help to him in ways that he scarcely dreamed of; and something kept saying to her that this is what she wished to be, that he needed her and she could fulfill his need. Why had he sent for her if something of this kind was not in his mind? Did he only mean to make her his mistress? . . . no, not that. His nature did not run in a channel of that sort; and if they became intimates it would be upon a basis in which she would be a free woman supporting herself; while he would have life to himself, as he wished it. But above all she kept thinking of what she could do for him; and how she could help him, if they lived together. What wonderful manuscripts she could make for him; what care she could take of his room, of his apparel; and if they lived in the country then she could put to use all she knew

of out door life and activity; for there was nothing from the trimming of an apple tree to the making of a garden that she did not know how to do, with her experience gained as a girl on the farm. She loved all these things yet; and if Becky ever loved them she had outgrown it and then had fallen into a soft life of lounging and feeding and complaining of her nerves.

As they feasted Kirby was thinking, too, of what Charlotte could be to him as his intimate or wife; how strong were her shapely hands! How healthy was her firm flesh! How clear and frank her eyes! Was it not good for women on the score of morality, and in order to bring out the best qualities of character, to have these experiences which tested courage, fidelity, sanity of heart, ability to see things as they are? And what was learned in the following of a curriculum of prohibitions and abstentions?

At last it seemed opportune for Kirby to tell Charlotte exactly what was in his mind. He had studied her out enough for this purpose and canvassed his own heart enough to be sure that he could lay his plan before her.

"I'll tell you, Charlotte, what I should like to do. In the first place I want you here with me."

"Why me?"

"Because I know you, and know what you can do, and our old association was so congenial, and I believe you are just the woman to help me, while I am helping you."

"You are so funny!"

"You think so? Well, perhaps I am. And at other times I have made plans and found that they were like sand piles that the wind blew away, or like cubes of air

that one carves in space expecting to fill them with the substance of life and finding that the atmosphere rushes in to the vacuum. . . . I have made lots of plans; but this time I have more confidence."

"Tell me, then, if you wish."

"Well, it is simply this, and I think you will be assured all around. When my mother comes I want you to come there with us to live. She wants me; and what I'd like to do would be to get her to like you. She's very individual and a little hard to handle; but I believe you can handle her. She needs a secretary all the time; and I expect she will be asking me to get her one when she arrives. Then I want to bring you to her very adroitly, and have her accept you, and I know you can do the rest."

Charlotte smiled and then laughed.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing, only you are so funny."

"Don't you like the plan?"

"I think it might be wonderful, but. . . ."

Charlotte saw that all this was just an arrangement by which Kirby could be in more or less daily association with her, and that he had planned it from the first. Still it was charming enough if it worked. But what kind of a woman was Mrs. Kirby? She was inclined to draw away a little from what she could not previse, and so she said:

"I think it is wonderful, but what would your mother think?"

"It would be all right with her. It's something to manage gradually."

Well, if Kirby was willing to take her into his mother's

house he was entertaining something of a plan rather serious and permanent toward her; and she was gratified, and felt that the ground on that score, at least, was secure.

"We will have to wait until she comes before I can see my way. If we can't manage what I have laid before you, then perhaps I'll be circumstanced so as to take you into my office; for I shall have a good deal to do for her, I am sure; and we'll see about the rest. In the meantime you don't need to worry about money, for I can help you sufficiently until we get your bearings."

"I believe I'll get me a job right away."

"No, don't do that. It will be only a few days before my mother comes; and that will show us what to do."

Charlotte accepted the decision, but made no comment. They left the table to return to the city and the hotel. Kirby took her to the elevator, then he went to get tickets for the theatre. She returned soon to dine with him; and then they started forth, Charlotte holding his arm in a mood of confiding affection and good companionship; and talking to him gaily of the city sights that attracted her naïve attention.

The play was a delight to her too; and she felt that life was opening out more richly for her, with something new and charming and gay for her all along the way in the many days ahead; and with Kirby growing fonder of her all the time, while she in some way became more useful and delightful to him. On his part, he thought for once in his life, if never before, he would let this experience unfold as it would without forcing its growth, and with the idea of allowing Charlotte to manifest her nature as she was

evoked to do by his evolving feelings. And so he ascended the elevator with her to her floor, and stopped a moment to say, "You will breakfast with me, won't you Charlotte?" She assented to this and he bade her good night, and went to his room.

And the next day Charlotte unpacked her trunk and sang. She was very happy. She was looking forward to his return to her at evening. . .

CHAPTER XXI

KIRBY's heart gave a bound as he saw the face of his mother when she appeared on the gangplank walking toward him; not very briskly it seemed, but rather as if she were feeling her way. He took her in his arms and kissed her, then asked about Myrtle, the contessa, and about the count.

Mrs. Kirby was accompanied by a woman, a Miss Wierenga who lived west, in Indiana, and who had acted as companion to her on the voyage, coming also from Rome. She had promised to stay a few days with Mrs. Kirby, who was anything but well. They took a taxi, the three of them, and drove to the Ritzdorf, which was Mrs. Kirby's favorite hotel, largely because she had often stopped there, and was habituated to it. How strange it was to enter the very suite which had been occupied by Becky and Minette!

He had never expected to see these walls again; and now he stood where he had parted with Becky, and he looked into the bedroom with the twin beds, one of which had pillowed her adorable head. Where was she now?

Miss Wierenga went out to see about the baggage; and Mrs. Kirby turned at once to her son and began to tell him what her problems were and what she wished him to do to help her. "She's a good thing," Mrs. Kirby said speaking of Miss Wierenga, "but I need some one very

different. I paid her passage over for what she has done for me; which has been simply what a maid could do and I need a very different person around me."

"What kind of a person?"

"Well, Skeet, I am not very well, and that accounts, as you know, for my delay in arriving; and I not only need a woman who can help me, but I want some one intelligent enough to be a companion. I had an English girl who was just everything to me, but just as luck would have it she left me when I was on the point of sailing. Her father died in England and she had to go to her mother. I knew Miss Wierenga, and she was coming back, and so I brought her along. She has been over there studying the Montessori method of teaching; and the truth is she is just a teacher. I want a young woman, some one who has life; and if she could help me with my correspondence and all that so much the better. It's one of the things I must attend to at once."

Kirby was trying to conceal his delight with the prospect that lay before Charlotte in this fortunate circumstance, but he said nothing just now, thinking that his plan would prosper better by letting it unfold gradually.

"Just as soon as I can I want to go out to see the place at Great Neck, and I must let Mr. Breed know that I am here, and see him."

"How are you really feeling, mother?"

"I shall be quite myself again very soon. I didn't go to Vienna; and I know now that the doctor in Rome did not diagnose my trouble correctly. I have had very bad stomach trouble; but the dieting has almost brought me back to my former self."

"I am so glad," said Kirby, as he studied his mother's

face bright with a wonderful spiritual courage, and tranquil with a self-possession that he had never noticed in it before. How beautiful she must have been as a young woman! Kirby's heart surged with the richness of these last days of sweeter life; and with the happiness of this moment facing his mother, who might, he hoped, have returned to her native land to be a close spirit, an understanding mother to him for the rest of his life. How he longed to love her fully and to know her all in all and to bind himself to her more firmly in such a love and appreciation! What suffering she may have had, what lack of devotion and justice from his father! Who could know about things like that, sunk in the silence of the past? Well, his father was long dead now; but here was his mother; and although Becky was gone, and so much of loss both of associates and of fortune had come to him, still here was his mother, who might be a wonderful factor in creating life anew for him. And there was Charlotte too!

"Shall I call up Mr. Breed and let him know you are here?"

"Yes, but don't have him come today, tomorrow afternoon. You saw the place, didn't you, Skeet?"

"Yes, and it's wonderful."

"I'm glad you like it, for I see nothing for you except to live with me in your present state. That Alicia, what a creature she was to take all your earnings, all your fortune! You've had a hard time of it, haven't you? And how are you doing at the law here?"

"Oh, very well, very well indeed. A Mr. Kennedy gave me some work and it has led to other things that have made me money."

"That's wonderful. You might have starved here. . . But we'll talk of all these things later. I think I'll have you devote most of your time to my affairs. Some one will have to go to Texas for me pretty soon, about those managers and all that out there; and then you'll have to see to the papers about this place. . . Oh, we'll see. Won't you press the button and order some tea and toast for us? . . . You'll have some, won't you?"

"Yes," and Kirby got the waiter and gave the order.

"How soon do you want to go out to Great Neck, mother?"

"Just as soon as I get a little rested, perhaps to-morrow."

Miss Wierenga came in now, and began to do what Mrs. Kirby asked her to do about the rooms; and at Kirby's request she went to the flower store of the hotel and brought back a huge bunch of roses which he gave to his mother with a kiss in honor of her return. Mrs. Kirby wished to be rid of Miss Wierenga for a time in order to talk to her son; and so she said: "This would be a good opportunity for you to go up town and see your friends, while my son is here with me. And you are returning to Indiana so soon, too. Suppose you go now!"

And Miss Wierenga made ready and departed.

"I got very tired of the life there in Rome, Skeet, and the count developed traits that didn't please me. Of course, I have to finance Myrtle, and will always have to. But I began to ask myself whether I always wanted to live abroad, and I didn't. And if I was ever going to put my roots down here again, the time was getting

short for me to do it. But the real thing was you, my son."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. I have not been unmindful of the fact that you thought I was not a good mother to you there back in Illinois. You were wrong about that; but, anyway, I could be a good mother to you now. You need a home, a wife, perhaps, but a home at least; and I want to give you one; and on the other hand I need you. I need your youth, your lawyer ability, your advice. And I am hoping that we can make a wonderful combination."

"I am sure we can, mother."

"The fact is, Myrtle gives all her time to sculpture when she is not going about with the count; and at last that left me to manage things for myself; and he grew to be not very considerate all in all. And so, as I said, my mind turned to you, and to America. I see evidences, too, of growing restlessness in European affairs. The German Emperor is dreaded; and he never makes a speech that he doesn't say something that sends a thrill through the whole continent, especially in France and Italy where the Austrian, with good reason, is so much hated. There will be a war some day, with so much trade rivalry to stir the envy and the dread of rulers and peoples."

"Well, we are far off from all that."

"Oh, yes, and that is a good reason to be here."

"I don't believe America has ever known a period of such freedom and gaiety, and hope of the future as now. We are having such a good time here: we dance and play and sing, and print what we like for the most part, and do what we like. The fruits of the scientific labors are beginning to come to us: men and women are on a freer

basis. The country seems to be in the control of youth and vigor; and it looks as if Mr. Wilson would be elected president, and that the old long-fought monopolists would have to give ground and fly. Also, thank heaven, we are at peace, and likely to remain so. I can't see why not. Of course, we are out there in the Pacific with the worthless Philippines, but the liberal faith of the country wants to get rid of them, and every one can see that they are no good to us."

"You are not in politics, are you?"

"Not at all."

"And you have really made the law go?"

"Oh, wonderfully."

"That is truly splendid, for ordinarily you would have encountered difficulties. Your office is way down town?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to come and call on you there, but it's too far while I feel so averse to exertion. When we get to making out the deeds for the place it can all be done here, Skeet, can't it?"

"To be sure. There are notaries in the hotel."

"I think we'd better go to Long Island tomorrow with Mr. Breed. Can you go, Skeet?"

"Certainly."

"Call Mr. Breed now and make the arrangements, won't you?"

Kirby stepped to the telephone and told Mr. Breed that his mother had arrived, and that they wanted to go out to the place and look it over. He made the appointment to do so, then turned to his mother and brought up the subject which he had put aside a little while before. "You spoke about getting some one to help you."

"Yes, do you know of some one?"

"I believe I do."

"Who is she?"

"A woman who has been a traveling companion, and all that, so I was told by Mr. Kennedy; but also a wonderful secretary, that I know; for before I got any one as a regular help to me I had this woman do occasional work for me, and she is splendid."

"She has never worked for you?"

"No, except just in the way that I have said."

Kirby hated to tell these little untruths to his mother; but he knew that the success of his plans required that his mother should not know things that would cause her anxiety. He did not want her to know at this time that the law business had practically failed in his hands; nor that he and Charlotte were friends.

"When could you get this woman for me?" she asked.

"I don't know. Very soon, perhaps. I'd have to look her up to find her. I don't know where she is now."

"Will you do that for me?"

"Indeed, I will."

And so Kirby was happy thinking that in this quite easy way the matter of getting Charlotte started as an inmate of their establishment was on the way. The rest depended upon Charlotte. She would have to inspire confidence in Mrs. Kirby. As to her ability to serve his mother there could be no question of that.

That night when he saw Charlotte he said to her: "I have everything arranged. In a day or two I want you to go to see my mother. Understand, we don't know each other very well. You have done work for me here, and I have heard that you have been a companion before.

You will have to make up your own little lies. I am depending upon you to make yourself indispensable to my mother; and then all will be well. We shall have to be careful until we get our bearings all in all. But it will gradually work out."

They went out to Long Island with Mr. Breed; and Mrs. Kirby was delighted with the house and the grounds; though it was clear that a good deal of money would have to be spent to put them in order. She bought the place and at once there were architects to see and landscape gardeners to consult; while Kirby on Saturdays and Sundays went to work clearing out the water sprouts and the dead limbs from the apple trees and helping to remove the scattered débris from the grounds and put it in piles. Mrs. Kirby was delighted with his industry; she remembered him as he was when a boy in Marshalltown, where he was so capable and industrious.

Kirby had drawn the deed at Mrs. Kirby's room in the Ritzdorf, and put the sale through. Also he did for her whatever she wished done about her other affairs. Her correspondence he pretended to take to his office to have done for her; but in reality he gave it to Charlotte, for whom he had rented a machine. They were very merry over this campaign of subterfuge, neither intending that it should work any harm to Mrs. Kirby. And after some days Kirby came to his mother and told her that he could send the woman to her, of whom he had spoken; and that he could have her call that afternoon, if she wished. And so Charlotte came to Mrs. Kirby.

"You are a stenographer are you, Miss Shanley?"

"Oh, yes."

"And a typist?"

"Yes."

"Do you read well out loud?"

"Pretty well, I think."

"Have you ever been a companion to any one?"

"Yes."

"Could you bring me some letter from some one that you were associated with in that way?"

"I am not sure. The lady that I was a companion to is in Europe now."

"So she is the only one?"

"Yes. My principal work has been in the business world as a stenographer and typist."

"You have worked for my son?"

"Yes, a little."

Mrs. Kirby thought Charlotte very pretty and womanly. She liked her voice and her manner, and her evident intelligence, and there was nothing to discredit Charlotte but everything to speak for her. Consequently she said: "Very well . . . where do you live?"

"Up town, quite a way."

"Could you come here tomorrow?"

"I could come the day after, I believe. I have some work to finish first."

"Very well. You understand what you are to do."

"I think so."

"I want you to help me with my letters, and do errands for me and answer the telephone for me, and just manage these rooms, so to speak, and be with me, and to stay here when I am out, and all that. There is a room next beyond which I can get for you." So with the arranging of the wages Charlotte went her way; and that evening she told Kirby that it was settled. "I like her

very much, Skeet," she said, "and I'll win out with her, I am sure. Certainly I'll do everything that I can to please your mother."

"It's funny, isn't it? Well, we'll both help her."

So Charlotte was Mrs. Kirby's secretary. She came in of a morning and breakfasted with her, and helped her to dress, and to get the day started. Then she wrote letters for her, and did errands and answered the telephone. She was so vital and smiling and rosy and of such abounding good will. "That woman is a treasure," Mrs. Kirby said to her son after a few days, "unless I am greatly deceived, as I have been sometimes."

Kirby had bought Charlotte some pretty dresses in order that she might make the best impression upon his mother; and Mrs. Kirby was delighted with Charlotte from the first. It was not many days before Mrs. Kirby said to Charlotte that she was to move from the room that she had been sleeping in and come to the bed by her side. Now there was a constant association between them day and night. This made it difficult for Charlotte and Kirby to see each other in privacy. But Charlotte had afternoons off; and sometimes Mrs. Kirby went out for the evening when she did not take Charlotte with her. They were beginning to wonder what their mode of association would be when they all lived in Great Neck. For at last Mrs. Kirby could not think of losing Charlotte.

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Kirby had put Kirby on an annual retainer of $3,600 to take care of all her matters for her. When the fall came one of Mr. Kennedy's assistants had gone into practice for himself, and thus left a room in Mr. Kennedy's suite, which Kirby rented, stipulating for the general service of the suite; and thus Kirby was

now established in a manner to cause him no shame, if his mother came to see him, which she did at last, being much impressed by his advance in the profession in New York in so short a time.

By the time that the house was made over, and just after they had moved in it, all with new furnishings, which Charlotte and Mrs. Kirby selected together, Kirby was sent by his mother to Texas to look after some of her affairs there. He hated to leave at this time, for he was taking the greatest interest in the place; and then there was Charlotte. He was surprised at the regret he felt in facing a separation from her. Mrs. Kirby wondered at times how such a treasure as Charlotte had come her way. She had talked with her, as time went on, asking Charlotte about her girlhood, and where she lived, and about her people, which Charlotte answered by telling the truth, emphasizing her girlhood as a farmer's daughter, her work on the farm, and her participation in all its activities. After all, was this not a better schooling than Myrtle had had, seeing that it made Charlotte so capable, and had given her such vitality and strength of temperament and body? There was not anything about the place that Charlotte did not know how to do. When Mrs. Kirby bought some cows, Charlotte went with her to see if they were what they had been represented to be; and when the cows came Charlotte went to the barn and milked them, laughing over the fun it was to her to do this, and saying that she had not done anything of the sort for years. If the cook went out Charlotte took delight in preparing the meals. She knew, too, about flowers and when to set them out; and about the vegetable garden, and how to fertilize it; and how to care for the oak

trees and the apple trees. In the house she kept an eye on the maids, on the marketing; she looked after the bills. Yet she always seemed to have leisure. She slept like a child, awaking refreshed and with a song; for her voice had a strange quality of uncultivated sweetness. And it was while all these interesting things were going on with Charlotte as the chief actor in them that Kirby had to leave for Texas. He went away regretfully enough, with a little fantastic fear in his heart that something might happen that he would not return.

"Where were you educated, Charlotte?" Mrs. Kirby asked one day.

"I didn't go to school after I was fourteen. I have only read a little."

"It seems to me your mind is very well-stored. You must have read a good deal."

"I think business girls pick up a good deal these days."

"You seem to know everything but languages. But after all, as I go along I see that people are very much alike, like we'll say horses, if I may use a homely comparison. A horse is a horse, though some can race and some can haul. Still their minds are pretty much alike. I have learned a good deal since I left that town in Illinois and lived abroad, and my valuations of life have changed, too. If you had been my daughter I should have been in terror to have you go out in the world as you did. But I don't believe I should now. Tell me about the peril to girls in America now."

"Well, in a way there are such perils, but they belong to the girls more than to anything else."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, take the matter of drink. A girl doesn't have

to drink, no one makes her. But if she runs around and is idle, if she loses sleep and lowers her nervous organization, and begins to pull herself up with stimulants and run with men who are after girls, then drink may ruin her."

"How about being a good woman?"

"A girl can do whatever she pleases about that. But things have changed about that, Mrs. Kirby. The woman coming into business life has changed that. Of course there is the same peril and suffering about love that there has always been, and that will always be the case."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean getting hurt, and that may undo a girl, get her hopes and her feelings broken and tangled and fling her into careless ways."

"You speak as if you knew, my dear."

"Oh, yes, I loved some one. But never again for me. I was hurt and I don't want to be hurt again."

"Would you mind telling me?"

"It was just a case of my loving some one who turned out not to love me, or at least to treat me as if he didn't; and so I had to cure myself and go on. That's why I came to New York, to get away from the old scenes."

"Where?"

"Chicago."

"Oh! . . and so you have taken care of yourself since you were fourteen?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are a very wonderful woman."

"Not at all, scores and hundreds of girls do this. They go on and work themselves out of difficulties just like the boys do, like the men do."

"But where did you learn all this about living, about the way to dress, about the little things of life and so forth?"

"All I know I picked up."

Mrs. Kirby was wondering now about the boarding school, its worth and whether she had not wasted many unnecessary regrets over the fact that she had not been able to do for Myrtle what seemed to be the correct and only thing when Myrtle was a girl in Marshalltown. She was also wondering what Charlotte's life had been in other ways: had she been married, had she had a lover, was she a so-called virtuous woman?

Well, in view of everything else about Charlotte, did it matter? She was sure Charlotte would have preferred marriage if the right opportunity had come to her. On the other hand, why would a woman of Charlotte's personality and aptitude marry anyone just to solve the matter of her relation to some man? Charlotte had escaped marriage with some one who proved in some manner unworthy of her, and had mastered herself and gone on with her life. And Mrs. Kirby thought that spoke well for Charlotte. Just now she allowed a further inquiry into these intimacies of Charlotte's life to pass.

It was early October when Kirby returned from Texas. Mists were coming up out of the sea, filmy shadows of sea ghosts, and in the scorched and yellow grass the crickets sent a running quaver of complaint. The leaves of the apple trees were brown in places and cobwebs were embroidered upon them here and there. The air was sleepy with the failing rays of the sun; and late birds hopped about without songs; while the wash of the waves seemed to be of more sonorous sadness than it was a few

weeks before. This weather brought Becky back to Kirby, because he had gone about the fields with her there at the Rock River on some such days as these. His mother came to him and asked him if he did not wish to stay at home for a few days, after this long trip across the continent; and that did appeal to him; besides he wanted to trim the apple trees, and have Charlotte help him. That gave him a chance to be with her; and he wished that now with a tenderness which he had not felt before.

They began with the trees by the water. Mrs. Kirby had a chair brought for her, and she sat near, and studied her son and Charlotte as they went about this work so enthusiastically. Charlotte had climbed at once, high up in a tree with the trimming saw, and was cutting off great dead limbs, calling to Kirby who was below her to watch out when the branch fell; and laughing when he was self absorbed and needed the cautioning. How wonderfully she climbed and got about; and how well she knew what to do! There were the stubs of branches to paint; and as they left one tree for another, there was the brush to pile. And so they went from tree to tree, while Mrs. Kirby watched them; occasionally turning to the book which she had brought with her. She grew tired at last and returned to the house, telling them to come when they were ready. And Charlotte and Kirby rested when she had gone, sitting at the foot of a large apple tree; talking, and giving each other kisses at times; and finally starting forth to explore the shore beyond their own acreage, where the land grew more elevated, and where Charlotte, who had been over the ground a little before, said there was a burying ground for the lost at

sea. Kirby wanted to see this; and they walked along in these secluded ways holding hands, very happy with each other. "How wonderful all this is," she said. "Here was poor me, almost down and out with that venture of mine, due to my trust and all that, and then you come along."

They had come to an inset of the shore, with a high bank above them, and nothing in front of them but the water, where there were no farers now; and he stopped and took her in his arms, pressing her yielding warmth to him with the hunger of separation. "I like you wonderfully well," he said. He had made up his mind that he would never use the word love to another woman until it was inevitable and irresistible for him to do so. He had spoken it to Becky, and too recently to leave his spirit free to utter the word now, though his passion for Charlotte and his admiration of all her honest and womanly ways had almost won him.

They climbed to the little burying ground, and pushed open a sagging gate and entered, to walk among the greatly neglected graves, and read the tragic inscriptions of those lost at sea. Then they stood and gazed far out over the water. He was holding her hand; and the breeze, brisker here than on the water's level, tossed her hair and shook the ribbons of her hat. "We must go back," she said. "Why?" "Your mother." "Always something."

"Always something," she echoed.

"But isn't it true? Charlotte! What do you think it is that makes men and women suffer so when they are separated, when they break with one another?"

"Why, they want each other."

"Do you want that man that you left?"

"No, not that . . . how could I?"

"You mean me?"

"Why, of course. He is not worthy to black your shoes. At the same time I went through the whole business of suffering for him; but it was so mixed with shame for him and for myself that the love matter was hidden under it."

"This isn't fair, Charlotte. I have been through a separation, too."

"I thought so."

"Why?"

"Why else would you send for me? I was the handiest thing for you. I understand the psychology."

"Don't say that."

"Oh, I don't mind so much, especially. . ."

"Especially what? . ."

"Seeing that you have been so fine with me . . . and——"

"And what?"

"Everything." She laughed, and took him by the hand and swung it in rhythm with their step.

"Well, Charlotte, there are two things about a break up, see if I don't get it right. One is the hurt to your mind or soul in its disappointment and defeat."

"Yes."

"And the other is the love denial with that one which sharpens and intensifies the spiritual agony, sort of exasperates and tortures it."

"Perhaps. I haven't been as deep in it as that. For while I loved this man, I see that it wasn't a love that got clear into my heart."

"I'm glad."

"And I'm sorry that you got hurt so badly."

"Why?"

"Because it was not coming to you. Any woman that you gave your love to should have returned it."

"She did."

"Well, she should not have withdrawn it."

"Perhaps she didn't."

"Maybe you are the one in the wrong."

"Maybe."

"That's better."

Kirby thus revealed himself from time to time. It helped him to say these things; but above all he felt impelled to be truthful with Charlotte. She was giving him an honest affection, and he could not do less than honor it with frankness.

And so talking they came back to the house bearing the saws and the pruners.

CHAPTER XXII

That night there was rain, for the afternoon had grown cloudy even before Charlotte and Kirby had returned from the orchard. . . He lay awake listening to the drop of the water from one of the spouts. It had grown cool, too, and for his mother's comfort he had started the fire in the furnace to take the chill from the air of her bedroom; while he had kept the fireplace burning brightly during the evening of reading. Charlotte was sewing upon hangings for one of the spare rooms. Here was delight and comfort at last for Kirby, after so much that had terrified his soul with loneliness and sterility.

He lay awake wondering if he could not go to Charlotte, but her room was next to Mrs. Kirby's, with a door between them. If only she would watch the opportunity and come to him. Thinking of this his mind turned to Becky, and to the night that she had stood in his room amid a thunder storm, and he had arisen and taken her desirable and trembling body in his arms. Then he dozed and slept and dreamed. He saw Becky, he was with her, they were at some place by the sea. And then she was gone from him. She was calling to him in that house of hers where the happiest moments of his life had been spent. He was hastening from room to room trying to find her by the sound of her voice, which called to him

from somewhere beyond open doors, through which he was hurrying. Then suddenly he was alone by the sea, it was winter, he was wearing a heavy coat, the gale was flapping it about him, and he was being observed by people sitting upon the glassed veranda of a hotel. Such a maze of fantasy! And such sighs seemed to come from his breast, mixed with the strains of music, music that he and Becky had listened to together in the days of their happiness.

He looked out at last upon a dawn of clouds and rain. No apple trees could be trimmed today, and should be read or go into town? Charlotte presided at the breakfast table. How rosy and fresh sleep had left her! There was a miraculous magnetism about her flesh, as he saw it in her arms, her throat; and how prettily she had dressed herself for the morning meal! All was so merry as she poured the coffee, and attended to Mrs. Kirby's wants with such daughterlike kindness and respect. Had she wanted to come to him during the night? Had she lain awake? He searched her face to find the traces of postponed desire; but they were not there. How better mechanized women's natures are than men's. . . . He wanted to see Evelyn now and learn what news there was. What had become of Rene, and how were the Walters faring? Would this not be a good day to look her up?

"Is there anything I can do for you this morning?" he asked his mother.

"Not a thing, son . . . are you going to your office today?"

"After while perhaps. There are some things I want to do in my room this morning." He said this because the dreams of the night were coming back to him now,

setting themselves rhythmically, and he thought he would try his hand at writing them out. Immediately after breakfast he went to his room and began to set down the rhymes. They came to him out of the walk of the afternoon before:

Far off the sea is gray and still as the sky,
  Great waves roar to the shore, like conch shells water groined.
With a flapping coat I step, brace back as the wind drags by,
  No ship as far as the seam where the sea and sky are joined!

I am watched from the hotel, I think. Who faces the cold?
  Why does he walk alone? 'Tis a bitter day.
But I trade dreams with the sea, for the sea is old,
  And knows the dreams of a heart whose dreams are gray.

Two apple trees, alone in the waste, on a sandy ledge,
  Grappled and woven together with sprouts, in a blackened mesh.
They are dead almost at the roots, but nourish the sedge.
  They are dead, and at truce, like souls of outlived flesh.

I have startled a gull to flight: I thought it a wave:
  White of his wings seemed foam, breast hued like the sand-hued roll.
When a part of the sea takes wing, you would think that the grave
  Of dead days might release to the heights a soul.

. . . . . .

I slept as the day was ending: scarlet and gilt
  Behind the Japan screen of shrubs and trees.
I awoke to the scabbard of night, and the starry hilt
Of day in the sky, to the old unease.
Sleeping a void in my heart is awake;
  Waking there is the moon and the wind's moan.
I would I were as the sea that can break
  Over the rocks, indifferent and alone.

  I awoke at midnight. The moon was still and high.
  Dead leaves stirred in the garden, a wind went by.
The moon stared into my room,
  And the oak trees leaned on the sky.
I awoke, and the moon was your face,
  And the wind your cry!

. . . . . .

I have climbed to the little burial plot of the lost
  In wrecks at sea. West of me lies the town.
  Below are the apple trees, pulling each other down.
Children are romping to school, ruddy from frost.

How the wind grieves around these weedy wisps,
  And shakes them like a dog, sniffing from patch to patch!
  I try the battered gate, lift up the latch,
And enter where the grass like a thistle lisps.

"Lost at sea!" Nothing thought out or planned!
  What need? Thought enough in a moment that battles a wave!
  What words were vivider? Where is the hand to grave
Words that tell so much for the lost on land?

Kirby had not noticed the passing the time, nor that the clouds had lifted and that the sun was shining. It was also past the luncheon hour; but Charlotte had not disturbed him until now. She rapped on his door, and asked him if he would not come down.

"I'll be there in just a minute or two. Tell mother please, Charlotte." "She's gone to town, Skeet." He laid down his papers and went to the door. "Gone to town," he echoed. She smiled a repetition of what she had said. "What for?" "To see some one. She said not to disturb you, and I haven't, and she didn't. She'll be back on the eight o'clock train, and wants us to meet her, or me, rather, for she thought you were going into town, too, after awhile." "I don't believe I shall," he said significantly. Then he gave her a swift embrace and a kiss and descended with her to luncheon.

"Here are letters for you," she said, as they passed through the hall. He looked at them and one was from Evelyn. For some intuitive reason he put it in his pocket, deferring its reading. She observed this, and felt a little twinge at her heart; for the admiration which she had felt for him long ago when she was his secretary had ripened into something warmer under these conditions of his unfailing kindness toward her, and this beautiful life, and the need that she saw in his heart for some one like herself to be his friend and his mate.

"You don't read your letter," she said with a little laugh. "It's from Evelyn Lyman," he frankly said, "and the reason I don't read it now is because I want to have luncheon with you first."

"Oh, you think it has bad news for you?"

"It couldn't have bad news for me, exactly; but I some-

times know when a letter contains things I don't want to hear, even before I open them."

They had the meal together, sitting opposite to each other as if they were the master and the mistress of the house. "You look so happy today," he said. "I am always happy . . . since I have been here. You don't know what all this means to me."

"Tell me, won't you?"

"Well, if you could know how first I hungered to see a city as large as Omaha; then how I hungered to see Chicago, and then New York; and how as a girl of eighteen or so, these far ambitions seemed impossible to me to attain. And here I am in New York and living just the way I want to; and perhaps some day I shall see Europe. I can't believe it, hardly. But New York seemed a long way off to me once. I wish I could tell young girls starting out that they can do nearly anything they wish to do. Only try your wings."

"Yes, you'll see Europe, though after all that is only the dream of country people trying to work away from their environment . . . not that quite; but it seems to be a great consummation to aspiring people. I have never been and don't care such a lot about going. How would you like to go with me some time?"

"Oh, my! Could such a thing ever be? Would they let us?"

"To be sure they would."

"Where did you get that book called Folkways?"

"Are you reading that?"

"I have been reading it over and over."

"Do you like it?"

"I think it has taught me more than I ever knew be-

fore. It shows me how little there is to this matter called morality, and how much there is to custom. . . ”

“And taste. . . ”

“Yes, taste. I find as I discover myself that taste is the whole thing with me. Really, I don’t like this idea of deceiving your mother the way we do. It isn’t nice, and she is so wonderfully good to me.”

“After all, are we fooling her? She is a very wise woman, one of the most wonderful I have ever known. What did she go in town for? I forgot to ask you.”

“To see the doctor, I think. She has been saying to me lately that she was not feeling well. And I wouldn’t distress her for the world.”

“Don’t worry, if you displeased her she would tell you so in a minute. I am sure that she thinks there is something between us. She hasn’t lived all these years for nothing, and she knows more about me, my nature and so forth than she lets on.”

“All that helps the situation a little, but this has worried me some.”

“Were you thinking of me last night?”

“Yes, and how about you?”

“I went to sleep thinking of you, then I had dreams, such wild dreams, and this morning I was writing verses. . . ”

“About me?”

“Well, they are about our walk out there by the sea, and about that graveyard where the lost at sea are buried. . . ”

“Why didn’t you write about me? May I see what you wrote?”

“When I get them finished and copied off.”

"Let me copy them for you, make a beautiful manuscript for you."

"All right." At the same time he knew that he could not let Charlotte do this. There was too much of the ghost of Becky in them. She spoke up suddenly: "Read your letter while I get a hat, to shade my eyes. I have something to show you." She disappeared for a moment, and Kirby read Evelyn's letter. True to his clarivoyance it contained evil tidings, evil for his state of mind. Alicia had come to New York and had taken a studio to follow the art of modeling and sculpture. He saw in this an envious and teasing emulation of his sister, the contessa, who had won some praise as a sculptor. Alicia was following him, as Cavette Errant had done. She was trying to do what his sister had done; she had brought herself into the set of the Walters and the Lymans, where he had made a place for himself. Could he enter at no door that she would not follow him through it? Could he make no life for himself that she would not in some imitative way attempt to share it, and so disturb it's beauty for him? How different she was from Becky who restlessly wandered away into paths that he knew nothing about. Her feminine imitativeness had concerned itself only with pretending to a knowledge of his favorite books. But did not all of them practice imitation; and there was flattery in this but also annoyance. Besides, in Alicia's case, since he knew that she hated him with such subtle malevolence, he feared all sorts of evil tangles, and irritating complications as the concomitant of her entering this little set that he had found in New York. He did not wish to meet her again; and there would be gatherings which he would have to forego in order to avoid

coming in contact with her. Perhaps the life of withdrawal was to be more and more the life-fate for him, in order to keep his soul free from these embittering circumstances. If that was to be his life he could stay here with Charlotte, and bring such people as he chose to his association.

Charlotte returned now and took him out into the grounds. There was an old flower garden where the poppies of a previous year had sprung up again, wildly, and were fluttering their dazzling scarlets in this autumnal sun. She took him to see them. "Next spring if I am here we shall have the most wonderful flower garden you ever saw. I know exactly what to do, and how to do it. I don't like to spade very well, but all the rest I can do, and I love to do it. Here is something you can do, you and I together." She took him further on to show him the fence around the vegetable garden, which had partly fallen down and was in a ruinous state.

"It's a good time to build a new fence. Why don't you speak to your mother about it and get the lumber and the posts, and let's set to work? We can do it on Saturdays, if your law business is too heavy during the week for you to leave it." This she said with a little laugh for she knew that he had nothing to do beside what his mother required of him.

"It may not be so long."

"Why?"

"Because Mr. Kennedy has spoken to me about something. It promises as big as that land case I lost there in Chicago, don't you remember?"

"Don't I? I was never madder in my life."

"Well, I am deliberating on taking this matter. There

is at least $100,000 in it if I win. It's one of those cases that a lawyer like Mr. Kennedy, with a settled practice, won't take; besides he is not a trial lawyer, and I am."

"You are that; I know you."

"Outside of that, as far as I know we'll build the fence for the garden."

"There is something else that I want to show you." She took him to an old chicken house and yard. "With just some wire and a few boards this can be made good, and I have asked your mother to let me raise some chickens. We're going to get an incubator, and I'll show you what I can do."

They wandered hand in hand toward the apple orchard paying no heed to the rain which had soaked the grass. "Your feet will get wet," he said, "In this tall grass."

"That won't hurt me," she replied. "I never catch cold, and I want to see how much more we have to do before we can call the work finished. It would take two or three days more; and then the brush should be burned. This is far away from the house, and no danger of its catching, and we can do it at night. Won't that be fun?"

Surely if he had any soul sorrow Charlotte could heal it with her simple interests to which she strove to bring him, and with increasing success. They went on to the water's edge and looked at the sea far out, and at the bay before them, now empty of pleasure craft. All the recreators had gone back to their work, or off to other fields of amusement.

That lends a pathos to such scenes, it is one of the evidences of the vanished summer, of happiness that has passed. He stood beside her thinking of these things, and she reached for his hand.

"I want you to know," she said, "How much I grieve for your disappointment."

"What disappointment?"

"You have suffered, you suffer, and I wish I could help you."

"You can," he said; and he leaned and kissed her. They walked about until late in the afternoon, and he was wondering if she knew anything of Becky, and if so how much. Love wounds are talked about, and they are divined where they are not known. What an offense it was to the simple heart of Charlotte that in her presence and amid her ministrations he could not avoid thoughts of Becky, the reckless sorceress, the courtesan in heart and mind; while Charlotte, in spite of all her missteps and her unæsthetic alliances, had kept a fidelity and a purity like jewels that have fallen into the dust . . . which a little care, however, can brighten. . . The moon was visible at last over the elevation near the place of the cemetery for the lost at sea. "Look, Charlotte," he exclaimed; but even then he recalled the moon as it looked when he stood with Becky that autumn day, at her door, and she pointed out to him the loveliness of the valley beyond her orchard over which the home faring crows were winging their way. "Beautiful fury," he said to himself, thinking of Becky's imaginative pursuit of his moods, no matter where he was or with whom he was communing. And these verses which he had just written, in which he had imprisoned his idealization of her face and her spirit, and his grief for the wreck that had fallen about their relationship . . . why had he permitted himself to write them?

They walked back to the house, where the cook told

Charlotte that Mrs. Kirby had been trying to reach her by telephone from New York, and had left word that she would call again at five. "She wants me to come to her," said Charlotte, "and I had better get ready."

"What makes you think so?"

"I just guess it; besides I must change my shoes." And she ran to her room, followed by Kirby after he had reconnoitered the ground.

He entered to find her sitting on the edge of the bed, having already removed her wet stockings, leaving her pink and white knees, so roundly developed, open to his delighted eyes. He sat by her quickly and took her in his arms, enraptured of the beauty which had been revealed to him. He held her from him, and looked at her. Her cheeks were flushed with the healthful air through which they had just tramped; they were more deeply rosy with the delight which she felt in the arms of this man whom she loved so devotedly, towards whom the tenderness of a mother and the fidelity of a servant poured from her strong and vital heart. He looked at her eyes, and saw how wide the pupils were, and with what steady flames they burned before him. His heart beat very fast now; he pressed her close to his breast. He was about to tell her that he loved her . . . but not yet! Over and over again he hoped to test his feelings, to be away from her and analyze his heart; to return to her and appraise his passion; to hold her thus to re-live whatever was authentically in his heart. Not now would he speak these words which he knew she longed to have him speak. But instead he stooped and kissed her knees so tenderly, so reverently that she grew faint with the delight of his passion and curled back softly upon the pillow, bringing her elbow

over her eyes, from whose lids the tears were starting. When he brought his face close to hers again she pressed his cheek with her lips.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered. "Beautiful," was the echo in her grateful and rapturous heart. To have these words said to her in a place like this, by this man, so strong and wise and good. What could she do to be to him all that he dreamed of a woman? If she could only give him happiness for life, not as his wife, if that was not to be, but as his mate, companion and friend. She arose and stood before him in utter simplicity and unconsciousness; and he studied the outline of her form, so firm and harmonious, so white and strong, so moulded and sweetened and perfected by her girlhood days in the sunshine among the wheat fields and the meadows of the west. Like an apple she had gathered into her being, physical and spiritual, all the miraculous alchemy of the out doors; and into these adorable breasts had come the sweet nourishment for rosy children, who would grow and smile and feast at their healthful abundance. Was this perfection of Nature to be defeated in its germinal richness, like an apple whose seeds are wasted by throwing them into the sea? . . .

She stared before him; then she returned to his side.

"May I say something to you?" she whispered at last.

"What is it, Charlotte?"

"I want a child, and a child with you."

Quickly all the difficulties of such a thing came into his mind; and he thought of them in their relation to other things; his own plans and ambitions. But he answered her. "Perhaps, we'll see." And she put her arm under his head and drew her to him with moving tenderness.

In the midst of this delight the telephone bell rang and Charlotte hastily putting a robe about herself ran to answer the call. It was Mrs. Kirby, saying that she had gone to stay with some friends for the night and would not return until the noon train the next day. Charlotte hastened back to tell Kirby the joyful news; for her heart was full of the prospect of the dinner soon to be served for the two of them sitting as they had at luncheon; and of the evening and the night.

After dinner she read to him from Folkways; and he drew her out from time to time, to get her appraisal of the book. Surely she understood it, and why not? Yet Kirby was always freshly enthralled with the spectacle of youth which has been denied opportunity, and yet rises quickly to an appreciation of nearly anything that the world of art or wisdom has to offer. It is the democracy of Nature which treats all her children so nearly alike. After a time Charlotte renewed an expression of her fears about his mother's attitude toward them and their secret.

"I can't bear to do anything to displease her, anything unfair to her wishes. She has been so good to me."

"Do you think she is blind? She knows me, she knows life, she keeps you here."

"Yes, but perhaps she trusts me, if not you; and are we fair?"

"Of course, she trusts you, but on the score of a woman who knows how to conduct herself."

"But the servants!"

"I really believe that mother has changed, due to her residence abroad. Her attitude toward happiness has changed, not that she hasn't always sought it, but she

sees that America too much is given to the punishment of happiness, and that its enemy is really envy. Take the matter of taxation as a revelation of this envy: amusements are always heavily taxed; and in war times they are almost penalized. The idea seems to be: those people are having just fun, let them pay for it . . . let them pay the fiddler. And did you ever notice that if anyone is injured while having a good time the newspapers make a great roar about the circumstance, and the preachers give out interviews. The other day a girl who had been out for the night drinking and dancing was injured in an auto collision when returning home in the early morning. They took her to the hospital, and while she was lying there unconscious they took a picture of the poor thing, showing her naked knees, and her torn lingerie, and her stupefied face. Below this was the comment of a clergyman to the effect that she would now have time to think of her sinful ways. Suppose she did have time? Wouldn't she have had time for that or some other regretful reflection if she had been burned in a laundry? The idea at the bottom of this is that happiness is sin, and if you are hurt while being happy, then you can see the sin better, as you can see shadows better by the side of light. Be miserable and you are always ready for death; be happy and you are out of the mood, and are therefore caught napping. Jesus preached some of that stuff. And the preachers of America, who are the shallowest of our minds because they have lived less, and read less, are the noisiest in their verdicts about the conduct of life. Something should be done to shut them up."

"Well, what about your mother, after all? I don't

want to be put out, I don't want to embarrass her. Something ought to be done."

"Leave it to me. I'll see about it. At any rate, I'll stand by you."

He was thinking that the thing to do was to be circumspect; and so this night he listened for the retiring of the servants who reached their quarters by a back stairway, and when they were together they sat in the darkness looking at the moon before retiring. But at midnight he went to his room.

The next morning he overslept. It was nine o'clock when he heard Charlotte laughing. She was talking outside to the cook; and when he looked out the window he saw her hauling wood in a wheelbarrow from the pile to the shed where it was kept for the fireplace. How strong she was, how vital, and what delight she took in these tasks with her hands! She was more beautiful this morning than he had ever seen her, with her rosy arms showing above the gauntlet of the canvas gloves which she was wearing; and her brownish ruddy hair loosened in tendrils about her forehead as she bent and wheeled the loads amid the laughter and talk of the cook, who had grown devoted to Charlotte, and took such great delight in an opportunity to be near her. . . She came in at last to have breakfast with him, and then he went to the train. He wanted to see Evelyn; and perhaps Mr. Kennedy was ready to take up the matter of the case with him. It had come into his ambition to make a competence again, if he could, so that he would not be dependent upon his mother, even as a client.

CHAPTER XXIII

The case was one in which a man who had left a million dollars, in money and stocks, no real estate, had promised his sister on her death bed to make a will in favor of her daughter, whom the old millionaire also undertook to adopt by the formality of the law. He had taken the girl into his household as his daughter, but had died without making the will or adopting her. His brother and sisters had laid claim to the estate. Could a promise to make a will be enforced in the courts? The case was not Mr. Kennedy's, but had come to him through a lawyer of Pittsburgh, who represented some of the relations living there, and who hoped to participate in the estate if the foster daughter could be given the estate; otherwise they would not share at all. The foster daughter had come in contact with Mr. Shields, this Pittsburgh lawyer, in this way, and had been directed to Mr. Kennedy in New York; and Mr. Kennedy did not want the case, owing to the great labor that it involved, and the doubtfulness of the outcome. Hence it was that there was a chance for Kirby to make a very liberal contract with the foster daughter, the expenses of the litigation being borne in part by the Pittsburgh relations who could only enter the litigation through the foster daughter.

On this morning that Kirby came to his office, he was consulted at once by Mr. Kennedy, who said that Mr.

Shields had come to New York the day before, and was anxious to make some arrangements about the handling of the case. Shields had left word that he would be back this afternoon; and in the meantime he had left a brief of the law for Mr. Kennedy to look over. "I can't take this case, Mr. Kirby," said Kennedy. "It is not in my line. I can't try it, for I don't try cases, and it looks as it would be a fight in court. If you don't want to go into it, say so, and I'll send it to some one else."

"May I look at the brief, Mr. Kennedy?"

"Certainly. Here it is. And if you can you'd better be here when Shields comes in."

He was thinking that Kirby had not been very attentive to business lately; but he trusted him to do his duty if he undertook this matter. And Kirby went to his office and read the brief. It was poorly put together, but it contained two or three precedents that were exactly in point. The question was were the facts within the principles of the law which the brief developed? Mr. Shields came in during the afternoon, and was introduced to Kirby by Mr. Kennedy; then he left the two to talk it over. Shields had a mass of statements of prospective witnesses, who would testify to the words of the millionaire, both when he promised the sister on her death bed to make the will, and to adopt the daughter; but also to the words that he had uttered in the subsequent years to the effect that he had made the promise and intended to carry it out. Shields was evidently that kind of lawyer who was better in massing evidence than in analysing the law. Kirby was impressed with this work which Shields had done, and wished to see the witnesses face to face to verify at first hand what these statements promised as to

their testimony; and Shields said that he would bring them in, all of them who were in New York; as to the others, could Kirby come to Pittsburgh to see them? But first as to his employment, and what did he want to take the case for? Kirby offered to act for twenty-five per cent of what they recovered for the daughter, and that was agreeable to Shields. He could bring the daughter to sign such a contract.

Kirby having gone into this litigation was obliged to come to New York on the early train. He commenced the next morning, telling his mother and Charlotte that for several days he would be busy and that all work on the place would have to wait for him for a time. There was the garden fence to build for which Mrs. Kirby got the lumber immediately, and the brush to burn, and the garden to prepare for the next spring. But there were evenings and Saturdays to do some of this work in; and meanwhile Charlotte could work alone if she chose. And she did, with Mrs. Kirby sitting near her, watching her delightedly as of old.

After the foster daughter came to see Kirby, her name was Dora Stanfield, and after Kirby had signed the contract to act for her, he went with Shields to see the lawyer who represented the brother and sisters of the dead millionaire, for the purpose of bringing about a settlement, if possible. The interview enraged Kirby and put him into a fighting mood, due to the manner of this lawyer who was a brusque, pompous man, very confident of his own ability and the rights of his clients, and who intimated that nothing but extortion was back of any attempt to disposses the brothers and sisters of their rights as the lawful heirs, for the benefit of a woman who had never been

adopted. As to the promise to make a will, that was too preposterous to discuss; and there was no law that would sustain such a promise, if he had made the promise. Kirby became nettled at this, knowing that there was respectable law for it, and he said so. But the interview resulted in nothing; and Kirby came away from it with his old fighting blood thoroughly aroused. He was determined to win this case and to discipline the insolence of this lawyer. Shields took heart in Kirby's wrath, for it was an encouraging recovery from the indifference with which Kirby had at first treated the case, and even Shields himself. And so Kirby was now enthusiastically involved in business that might occupy him for months to come.

Then Kirby went to Pittsburgh and saw the witnesses there. At home he became preoccupied; but as the time approached for the trial of the case, he thought it wise to build up physically for the ordeal that was ahead of him; and consequently he set to work with Charlotte, making the fence for the chicken yard and helping her burn the brush. It was late November now, but mild, and they had rare evenings under the moon again when Charlotte went about with a fork throwing half burned branches into the fire and carrying coal to brushes not yet burned. He told her about his case and the developments of it as it went along.

"I believe I shall have luck with this. It's about time for me to have luck with something."

"You have always had luck and didn't know it. I never saw anyone who had more luck than you." She was making allowances, too, for his disappointments, for the woman, whoever she was, that Kirby had lost; for a woman that is lost cannot well be kept; and why not consider the loss

good? That was Charlotte's philosophy, under the influence of her desire to win him for herself, if she could and he respected the winning. She had been schooled in life enough to part with him if she could not keep him; but she was glad to go on with him in these charming days for so long as they lasted, happy that life had given her so much.

On an evening when he was delayed in returning home he went to see Evelyn, who told him much of Alicia and her studio and her adventures in New York with the Walters and others.

"I don't intend to have her here, however," Evelyn said. "I saw her once at the Walters', and that is enough for me. She has one of the most designing and cunning faces I have ever seen. And in a way, Skeet, she and Becky are kin, though I believe that Alicia is the more collected and coldly vehement spirit. Becky is scarcely collected at all . . . but you understand."

"Bob Hayden once wrote me a letter in which he analyzed my character as having a quality which excited hostile fiends to swarm around me in my relations with people; and he also said that I had a genius for self-laceration. In Alicia's case I don't know what makes her keep after me. I went to the Rock River cabin to get away from her and to heal myself; she followed me there, and spied upon me, with the result that my affair with Becky was known to her, and she used her knowledge concerning it to take my fortune away from me. I had to give it to her or have Becky drawn into the court. Having paid her off, and saved Becky, the episode should be closed for me. I should not be pursued by her to this new life I have again made for myself."

"You have scorned her and she will not quickly forget it. She probably thinks that your sister, the contessa, inspired you more or less to leave her and so she takes up with sculpture to tease you and the contessa. It's all quite absurd, and you should put it out of mind. You are still somewhat in nerves. Just go your way, and be sure your nature will justify itself and be accepted for what it is."

"You will be sure to help me so that I shall never meet Alicia at any place here in which she may force herself?"

"Yes, and especially my home. You can be assured on that score. And now do you find in Alicia's manœuvers solace for the loss of Becky, for they are much alike in many ways, and Alicia's pretentious assumptions and affections of art are lots like Becky's and her mouthing of Schopenhauer. It is so fine for a woman to be honest, and to win admiration for her womanliness, and not through these showy egotisms which decoy men's hungry minds and hearts and are intended to do so. This town's full of women with studios, oldish women who have evolved too late and have money to provide themselves with everything except the gifts to create. This world of spurious activity should not concern you. And Becky has betaken herself away so that you are no longer reminded of her humbuggeries. The reason we never got along better together, as it finally turned out, was due to Becky's theatricalism, which didn't rise exactly to the dignity of becoming hypocrisy and yet was more offensive, because in a sense itchy and insect like. All that talk about her daddy, all her buying of books which she couldn't understand, and all her talk of them."

"And yet that is what drew me, the hope that our

minds could wed each other; and I believe that her enthusiasms were real, and her understanding sound on these things. The hope of mine to find such a woman has been my disaster, and it looks to me now as if I should end the search, with Alicia and Becky to my credit, and no one else."

Kirby was wondering if Alicia had not come to New York for the purpose of exploiting him in some other way than this in which she was extracting the essence of his secret pride; and could it be possible that some time she and Becky would join hands in some adventure of retaliation upon him. He had heard Bob Hayden talk of the enmity of women as constituting the most intangible and venomous danger which could surround a man's life, corresponding to snakes which hunt, and which may rear their heads to strike when the exhausted victim has fallen by the way to sleep. . . It was a degradation to a man to have these things in his life, and equally so to think of them. What could be more enervating and belittling? And so this matter of Alicia was not ended, but had taken a more expansive and subtle form and might penetrate his living more or less for a time in spite of himself. It was somehow to be mastered, that was his determination.

One evening Charlotte disappeared, either to burn brush or to walk by the sea. She would do this at times. Once she was out until midnight, and Kirby took a lantern and went out to search for her, fearing that some accident had befallen her. Instead, she was sitting on a rock near the water, her hands clasped around her knees. This night she walked out, and after she had been gone a while Mrs. Kirby began to talk to her son about Charlotte and his attitude toward her.

"I want to say this to you: you must be perfectly fair with Charlotte. I won't have it any other way."

"Fair, how?"

"Well, in the first place you must be careful of her; and second you must not lead her to have hopes that you don't intend to fulfill."

"I shall be fair with her."

"You must. You are fond of her, I can see that."

"I am very fond of her."

"You could do no better than to marry her."

"I don't want to marry. . . I want to tell you something. It gives me a sort of healing to have this association with Charlotte. But it is so wonderful, mother, after our separation, your absence abroad, after our misunderstanding when I was a youth, to have you back here, and to have you so wise and tolerant and sympathetic with life in the broadest sense."

"You may come over and kiss me for saying that." And he went to her and drew her to him with a tender impress of his lips upon her own.

"And now I'll tell you something; it was all perfectly true that the count and I did not get along, and all that I have said about returning to America and the reasons for it are true, but there was something that was and is truer still."

"What is that?"

"You."

"Why, mother!"

"Yes, I have been the searcher, as you are now, and my going away from the little life of Marshalltown was in search of something of life richer and finer and freer, than I had known. This money came to me in this mirac-

ulous way; and with all respect to your father's memory there was something fixed and immobile about his nature. He would have stayed in that town forever, and the great world could have gone hang for all of him. But that is not my nature, and so at a time when you were otherwise occupied, and indeed had left my life and gone to Chicago and your father clung to the old and dying ways, I left you all, and went abroad. I have had that experience, all that I can assimilate. And then what happened? I heard about you, your disaster, and I saw that the time had come for me to enter your life again, as your mother, wise now, I think, to do for you as a man, what I did for you as a child: to guide and strengthen you. Hence it was that when I saw this companionship between you and Charlotte, I was glad, and glad, too, when I saw that she was a woman who understood herself and life, as much as you did; the only thing is you must not lead her to believe that you are going to marry her when you don't intend to. I am too fond of her to have her suffer on account of anything like that."

"And to hear you say all this."

"Why, I have said over and over that you never knew me."

"Perhaps not, but all is compensated for now by knowing you. Sometimes I think my life has grown suddenly very rich, and at the very time when it looked most impoverished. I have had a terrible time since coming to New York, the half could never be told, and what preceded it. I want to get something off my mind now that we are talking. I have been a little untruthful with you. I knew Charlotte back in Chicago."

"As a sweetheart."

"No, but she worked for me back there, and in bringing her to you I knew that I was bringing you a treasure. And I sent for her to come to New York, because I was so desperate and trying to master myself."

"Another love affair!"

"Yes."

"Oh, this terrible thing called love . . . I want you to get it under control, so that you can use it and it won't use you. What was this love affair?"

And Kirby told his mother all about Becky, revealing the fact that she was the brisk American that Myrtle had met by chance in the Boboli Gardens, and of whom Myrtle had written to him, suggesting that he pay her court, now that he was freed or to be freed from Alicia. But he went on to make it clear to his mother that he met Becky before Myrtle's letter had come to him; and that Becky had sought him out, having learned from Myrtle where he lived and something, perhaps, of his career.

"Myrtle is not a wise chooser in such matters, and never for you."

"I know that. We see life quite differently. But Becky enthralled me from the start."

Then he told his mother the whole story, even as he had given it in detail to Bob Hayden; and what the affair had cost him through the malevolent use that Alicia had made of it; and of the collapse of his relationship with Becky, painting for her the terrible scene of their parting.

Mrs. Kirby's eyes grew very comprehending at this pass of the story. Her high intellectual forehead shone under the light, as if revealing the spiritual force and passion which were behind it, as her sensitive susceptibilities registered pain and indignation and regret.

"Such a woman," she ejaculated at last. "Neurotic, unreliable, untruthful, irresponsible, self-complexed, selfish, vain, and immoral, for she was promiscuous all the while, and that will not do under any code whatever. And above all she was envious of you. . . ."

"How envious?"

"Why a part of her behaviour was due to the fact that she feared your superiority to her, and she did some of these things to break you down and so reduce you to her own level, or to prevent you from using your superior power."

"I had never thought of that."

"No less it is true. Women are full of such things. Many of them are Delilahs clipping the hair of their Samsons, in order to enslave them to enemies, their own lusts and prides and vanities. They anticipate the day of their desertion by the man, or their rejection by him, and they punish and weaken in advance with these cruelties. While the affair is going on they wound their lover in order to keep his pride in their capture, and to keep his own strength from penetrating into their weaknesses and seeing their beauty under the clear light of inevitable disillusionment."

"Why, mother, I didn't know that you had gone so deeply into these things."

"I have not lived nor read of life in vain. You are well rid of that Becky Norris; and if at any time you have a tendency to vaporize over her I want you to think of something about her that was ugly or ridiculous and then laugh; or better still run to Charlotte and give her a kiss; for there is a woman, a real woman. Listen: If I ever had any tendency to reduce a woman to the criterion of her

sex life I am well over that. Whoever thought of doing such a thing with a man? If Byron had mistresses he was also a rider and a fencer and a poet; and Webster may have been a drinker, he was great as a lawyer and a speaker. If Charlotte has had extra marital relationships, she is a capable housekeeper, a good secretary, a woman skilled in many things; and she has all kinds of virtues, like humor, and self-control, and the spirit of happiness, and an essential honesty; and she is as far above Becky Norris in all the qualities that make a human being admirable as it is possible for one human being to be above another. I repeat to you, you must be fair with her. I shall resent it if you are not. She is quite capable of taking care of herself; but if you just use her to cure yourself of Becky Norris and then go your way, you will be doing as wicked a thing as if you used Bob Hayden in some selfish way and then passed on to a desertion of your friendship for him. It will not do, and you will be punished if you do such a thing."

"Don't worry, mother. No matter what my intention toward Charlotte was at the start, I am guided now by a deep seriousness toward her."

"If you wanted to marry you could do no better."

"I don't want to marry, and I believe Charlotte does not."

"Nonsense, every woman wants to marry . . . and for reasons; however, you remember all that I have said to you."

Charlotte's step was now heard in one of the farther rooms, and the mother and son changed the subject to the will case which he was soon to try, as it now seemed.

"Where have you been, Charlotte? We were beginning to be worried about you," said Mrs. Kirby.

"Out by the water, through the orchard."

"Weren't you cold?"

"No, it's just bracing, wonderful."

Her cheeks were flushed from the fresh cold air, and the exercise of walking. She went to the closet under the stairway for logs to rebuild the fire and then sat down to her sewing. In a few minutes Mrs. Kirby retired and left Charlotte and Kirby to themselves. After a time he said: "Well, Charlotte, I believe she knows."

Thinking perhaps that Mrs. Kirby's withdrawal was due to displeasure with her, a fear entered Charlotte's heart suddenly that a change awaited her life; and she said: "What's to be done?"

"Nothing. It's the funniest thing you ever knew. If you had known her as I thought I did. . . . She is not going to part with you. She is very emphatic in her advice to me."

"That's funny," said Charlotte, and she kept her eyes down while thinking over the whole matter. Should she now talk to Mrs. Kirby and tell her what her position had been, and how she had drifted into this course of deception?

CHAPTER XXIV

It was spring again. Kirby was lying awake one morning at about five o'clock completely refreshed from sleep which had begun at nine o'clock the night before. A mist had come up out of the sea, and the air was cold. In the midst of this twilight and inclemency he heard the chirp of some strange bird . . . just one chirp and nothing that followed, and no answer. That was the first herald of spring, as it turned out. The next morning was fair, and there were other birds. Then the air was milder, gradually, the winds blew more softly, a few buds appeared, and the white clouds began to race across the deep blues of the sky.

Charlotte at the first intimation of the season's change had filled the new incubator with eggs. The chicken yard had been rebuilt through her labor and Kirby's, and the garden had been put in order, all fertilized for the vegetables which she had planned to raise for the household. She was always busy, between these occupations and the work that she did for Mrs. Kirby in attending to her correspondence and personal affairs. She was also copying from time to time the papers which Kirby gave her to do in the will case, which was taking much of his time now and which promised soon to come on for trial.

Kirby spent all the time he could with Charlotte in this care of the place and in assisting her with these

amusing labors. He rarely went to town on Saturday; and the Sundays were occupied with walks and sometimes in visits to the city to attend parties given by Evelyn or the Walters. They had received Charlotte with delight, finding in her unpretentious ways and her lively interests and nature much to admire, and she always entered into the festivities of the hours with such jollity and good will that they considered her an addition to their group. Evelyn had said to Kirby: "Where did you find that pretty and good hearted woman?" And he answered her with unbetraying simplicity: "She's my mother's secretary." "And your sweetheart," rejoined Evelyn. "Not so well dressed and silk lined as Becky, but all the better for her and for you." "She seems to find her place with us." "Why wouldn't she? A woman like that can make her way anywhere."

Thus it was that Charlotte and Kirby shared together the social life which he had evolved from his acquaintance with Evelyn, which dated from those first days with Becky and his trip to New York on the mission of bringing out his first book. And they danced together at the various places, where they found the art practiced; sometimes in the pavilions by the sea, sometimes at restaurants in the city. Kirby found it a wonderful form of exercise as well as a mode of artistic expression; and with Charlotte it grew to be an experience of unification of their feelings, their delights. She was little and graceful, and harmonized her steps with his more perfectly than any partner he had ever known. And as dancing became more and more a fashion and a rage, Kirby was wondering at the cause of the vogue and began to read about it, finding that it was treated by many authorities as one of the

greatest of socializing and moralizing influences allied both to poetry and to music. Mozart was a skillful dancer; the symphony grew out of the development of the dance suite; the Greeks, and the Egyptians before them, had cultivated dancing in their dramatic and religious expressions; and among the Romans dancing and war were closely allied. Was there something moving in the world and through men which caused them to exalt and discipline their natures for war by the gymnastics of rhythmical movements?

As the will case did not come on for trial, and as Kirby had time on his hands after giving attention to his mother's interests, he decided to devote himself to reading. All his life he had been given to long campaigns of great reading; and he saw that his separation from Becky had relaxed the interest and the desire which had led him along those delightful and enriching paths. He resolved to return to them.

But first it seemed best to leave nothing neglected in the will case; and there was the brief which Shields had done so imperfectly. Besides, the case wore a different aspect than it did at first: there was a widow of the dead millionaire to reckon with, who perhaps could claim no interest in the estate, since she married the man after he made the promise to will his property to the foster daughter; but at any rate her presence in the problem of the litigation required a recasting of the material of the law. And Kirby went at this with great industry and skill, finally putting together a summation and analysis of the law which he was confident would stand the test of forensic attack. Then as the case was still delayed for trial, he turned to reading and to the making of notes.

Something led him to Plato's Republic. Was it Bob Hayden's impregnating question, "What is a Republic?" He was not sure that he found so much of a solution of the problem. There were things more interesting to him: Plotinus whom he had studied long before, and partly read over with Becky; and histories of the origin of Christianity, and of mythologies; and the debates which occurred at the formation of the Federal Constitution, and the lives of some of the early notables of America, the life of Franklin giving him the greatest pleasure. Kirby thought him the greatest man that America has produced, and one of the greatest men of all times, having something in common with Leonardo, a union in his nature of the artist and the scientist, imagination being at the bottom of both kinds of genius. He also took up the notes of Leonardo, and afterwards read many of the poets over again, and at last Darwin's Origin of Species.

When dancing with Charlotte he sensed new meanings and found clearer interpretations of these thinkers; and the inspiration of music and the harmony which it created in his moods gave him appreciations of words and style which he had not had before. All of this was developing, and in such contrast with that life, with that course of spiritual suicide which he was following after he separated from Becky! Could he be thankful enough to Charlotte who had done more to bring him to his new life than anyone else? Although perhaps she had not consciously contributed to his regeneration. His mother, too, a more thinking and shaping aid . . . how could he be sufficiently grateful to her?

Amid these studies he was helping Charlotte with the garden and the chickens; and there were the flowers which

Charlotte had planted in the plot where they had found the poppies growing as neglected fosterlings of a previous year. "If this life can only go on," Mrs. Kirby said one day, "I shall ask for no greater happiness." She was now as fond of Charlotte as if she had been her daughter; and she often studied her son's face to see if there was in it any betrayal of under-appreciation of Charlotte. She saw none . . . and wondered what would come of this relationship. If Kirby went away from Charlotte, Mrs. Kirby would stand by her and keep her at her side just the same.

It was in July that the will case came on for trial. Kirby was very eager to win it, as he wanted to make himself independent of his mother; and having mastered the intricacies of her business he was ready to turn it over to some subordinate if he were financed outside of the retainer which she was giving him. Then he could devote all his time to living and study and to writing.

Evelyn and the Walters, with Mrs. Kirby and Charlotte, being drawn by the nature of the case, came to hear it tried. It involved much human interest, and it was clear that Kirby's success would depend upon the manner in which he could dispose of the sentimental weight which the widow brought to the balance of the questions involved. He was willing that she should have a widow's share of the estate; but her counsel repudiated that with indignation. Then Kirby offered to allow the widow to testify in her own behalf; and her counsel gladly accepted the opportunity. Shields feared that this would be their undoing; but Kirby was confident that if he had a chance to cross-examine her, he could so thoroughly expose her money lust as the motive for marrying the old millionaire that

he would destroy her claim upon the estate based upon any sentimental ground. His long analysis of Becky seemed to serve him here; for in the crossexamination of the widow he completely unmasked and exposed her. Then as the decision was about to pass in favor of the foster daughter for the whole estate, Kirby again offered to give the widow her widow's share if she would consent to the decree and end the litigation. This was again rejected; the decree passed to the foster daughter for the whole estate, and the case was appealed. This was a great disappointment to Kirby who in his passion for quick results and life had hoped for present successes in order to establish his immediate independence.

"It was a very wonderful exhibition of patience and skill that you gave us in the crossexamination of that artful woman," said Evelyn. "I hope the court of review will value it rightly. I can't bear to see you lose now."

His mother, too, was delighted with him, not knowing before what his ability as a lawyer was; and she wondered more than ever now why he had tried to keep out of the profession.

The next night after the case was ended the Walters and Evelyn and her husband came out to have a lawn supper with Kirby, his mother and Charlotte, which was served under the apple trees. It was an evening of the full moon. Mrs. Kirby had found great delight with Evelyn; they talked of Kirby, his temperament, his dangers and prospects, and his possible future, with some guarded references to Becky, who was not the woman for Kirby, Evelyn made free to say.

"Not at all," said Mrs. Kirby, with unconcealed emphasis. "I know enough of her to say that."

Charlotte was mistress of the occasion. She went about looking after the wants of the guests, and seeing that the servants took care of them. "A very charming woman, that," said Evelyn. "And it makes me wonder about education and careful rearing. It makes me think of experience in life as the best of teachers."

And with the will case over and this supper ended, one of those pauses in life came the next day, which Kirby had often observed after returning from a trip, or after the cessation of some interest: life has to be created anew. The old material has been used, and one must wait until something is grown wherewith to weave a new pattern of life. He was back now to watching his mother's interests, back to reading; back to visits in town; and back to the simplicities of Charlotte's garden and the walks and the dances. And all these things were old.

CHAPTER XXV

It was the summer of 1914, and the month of July. Bob Hayden was again in New York, not very well, but not complaining, and as full of ideas and talk as ever. He and Kirby had met a few times in town, and lunched together at the Ritzdorf, where Hayden recalled the parties of Becky and Minette and his trip up town to see Mr. Edwards and get liquor for them. They had gone over the intervening years, Kirby's life in New York. Kirby had told Hayden of the soul humiliation which came to him after Becky left, about the return of his mother from Italy, and about Charlotte . . . about the little office which he opened, and the visit of Cavette Errant who spied upon Kirby's fallen state, as he phrased it to Hayden.

"You're a funny fellow," said Hayden, with a great laugh. "A mind which magnifies what is, and sees it plainer than anyone, and sees what isn't there sometimes." They had gone over the will case, not yet decided in the court of review. "You'll win that," said Hayden. "There is the salt of right on your side, which no court will overlook." But Kirby was skeptical. He was inclined by habit to lack faith in life and men.

Hayden was staying with Murray Mitchell as before; and although he kept promising to come to Long Island to see Kirby, the day was always postponed. He was not well. He had overcome to some extent the ominous pain

in his heart, which had given Kirby anxiety; but Hayden did not have the old energy and delight in life. During the past year he had written Kirby many letters, some humorous, some pessimistic, some speculative, of his own condition of health; many discursive on the state of the country; and the symptomatic activities of the various swarms of politicians, reformers, artists and what not. And now that they were face to face, he was going over the ground again of many of these subjects. "But the worst is, Skeet, I don't feel right. Drink hath lost its savor; and it is proscribed for me save in the greatest moderation; and as for women I am a dead man. They used to hunt me, and now they pass me up; and it has a marvelous effect of depression and self-disvaluation to be treated in this way. The hell of it is that just at the time of a man's life when his mind is richest, his body begins to lose its sap, and his leaves flutter less green and less seductively, and so they pass you by. For they are the most intuitive things in the world, the women, about this matter, and what they want above all things is to be loved and to be loved athletically. The spiritual upshot for the man is that he loses interest in nearly all things, for the whole business of life is the hymeneal chant, and when your singing upon the bough does not interest the mate, because she knows that if she came over to your roost that it would do her no good, why sing? I call this Nature's most ironic whim and joke; for teasing and fooling and tagging are the essence of irony."

One day they went into the bar of the Ritzdorf, a wonder of cut glass and mahogany, of great cheeses and sandwiches and crackers, with porters and bartenders, immaculate in white linen, hurrying about to serve the pa-

trons. Many stood at the bar talking and laughing and drinking beer or spirits. The social side of human nature was supreme here; and men were expressing themselves in good will and genial conversation. Hayden and Kirby stood at the bar, one taking beer, the other a cocktail, and they were continuing their philosophizations.

"It will not be ten years," said Hayden, "before this place will be used for a candy store or something else."

"It can never be."

"You will see. For twenty-five years the school text-books on physiology have been doctored, against the will of the publishers, to scare people about the effect of alcohol; and in that way an opinion against it has been formed. It's mostly a lie, but the school boards of some of the states have demanded such books. Then the saloons have been lied about in the newspapers, for what they want is something sensational; and the preachers must have something to denounce, and the newspapers like to print their ill-founded howls. The result is that a public opinion has been built up, on lies mostly; and pretty soon something will happen. Look at the states already where the saloon is abolished. Yet there was never a better institution, save for the fact that persecution has made it organize itself and get into the lobbying business and thus become crooked and insidious. The thinking people of this country are in the minority; the great masses don't think; yet to them the reins of government are handed; and these masses are moulded by the lies that become stock in trade on the part of preachers and reformers and newspapers. The home against the saloon! A good slogan, if you don't consider that it's boredom against relief of some sort, and that the removal of the

saloon, leaves people to hunt for something else, since life is essentially a chase to escape the fiend of ennui. I am for the home and the saloon; and when I don't want one I want the other; and I don't want anyone to tell me where to go and when to go. . . It's time, I think, for us to take up the discussion of what is a republic, considering that Europe is in such turmoil.

"There is going to be war over there; for the time has come to take a fall out of the Kaiser. The assassination of that Serbian prince, and the demands of Austria look warlike."

"In times of the black death, and in wars people have retired to tell stories and to take an inventory of life, and I have this to propose: Come out to Long Island and stay with me, and let's have a good long visit. My office does not take much of my time, and my mother and Charlotte will be glad to have you."

"And how is that working, that matter of you and Charlotte?"

"Marvelously."

"You never did a wiser thing in your life, nor a better than to get away from Becky and to forget her."

"If I have."

"Haven't you?"

"I think of her yet sometimes. The truth is she almost hypnotized my entire soul with her æsthetic appeal; and those things are hard to forget. What is it to discover that hair of gold is only hair of coarse seaweed, when you can't forget the music that you have heard from these singers perched on wounding cliffs that tower over the perilous waters? That is the secret of these things, Bob. But listen: won't you come out and stay with me?"

"Later, perhaps."

"Will you come out to a party . . . an all day and all night party? We'll get out under the apple trees and talk. I'll have Evelyn and her husband and the Walters; and believe me when my mother takes a hand there is something doing too. She is wonderful. And let's talk out a few things and have a good time."

"Yes, I'll do that . . .

"What was that?"

There was sound of nervous voices near the lobby entrance, and many men entered in great excitement. A newspaper boy entered shouting "Extra" . . . War had been declared in Europe! Germany was getting ready to move on France; Russia was mobilizing. The world had taken fire, and the British Lion was growling . . . Hayden bought a paper as Kirby did, and they went to a table to take seats. After a time, Hayden said, "Well, it has come. I have been looking for this. Do you remember what I said at your place three years ago, that a war impended which would make the French Revolution look like a riot in Halsted street? Well, this is it. Germany will speedily crush France, if she is not helped, and that means that Germany will be all supreme in Europe, and England cannot allow that. There is hell to pay now sure enough; and the thing for America to do is to steer away from this."

"How can we get in it?"

"Search me! Anything can happen. England may want us in it. If she does, she'll get us in it. She has the best organized system of creating public opinion in this country right now that she could wish for; better than a candidate's press bureau; and the masses will not know

how they are moved, if England sets to work to draw us into the war. You will see, too, that our ports will be more or less controlled by England, and our sovereignty will be flouted as of old."

"I don't like to see France crushed. She helped us once."

"Nor I. But here we were going along fine, solving a lot of our problems, and getting freer and wiser and putting some long agitated matters into good laws; and along comes this squabble over seas, and it's going to throw a monkey wrench into our machine, I fear. . . Well, what are you and I? Just mites that are blown about by air currents, started by the swift moving feet of gods in another part of the world. I hate this. For we were doing things for liberty here, and wars always bring an aftermath of despotism. My life is lived, and it doesn't matter much about me, but you are in the midst of life, and I hate to have you live through this; and I hate it for the minds your age."

Hayden grew pensive at last, sometimes looking steadily at Kirby for long minutes, then turning to the newspaper again. The crowds swarmed at the bar, growing louder, growing fainter by turns in strophes of rejoicing and apprehension. Germany would win the war! France, the harlot of Europe, would be wiped out. England would be disciplined if she interfered. The Teutonic triumph was at hand. America would thrive in the decline of other powers! The aching bands of earth were to be loosened. A new day was at hand. War was evil; war was divine and biologically predestined! More trade! More munitions. Provisions for the battling nations! Great prosperity for us! The world would rise to nobler moral disci-

plines and visions! Champagne, please! I am off to Europe as soon as I can go! My wife and children are over there! I must go for them! There will be scurrying now for America! What will my daughters do who are in Germany at school?

In a moment all these problems were scattered in New York and everywhere in America, as a rising breeze drives sparks over a stubble field from a burning stack of straw!

Hayden had to return to Murray Mitchell's apartment; and Kirby thought he would go down to see Evelyn and ask her about coming to the symposium that he wanted to give with Bob Hayden as the principal figure. "I've had a letter from Becky," she said. "From Bombay. She is there with Constance . . . just a postal card." She went and brought it to Kirby. There was her fine Shelley-like chirography, and the habitual cryptic words. It only said: "The button I use in my game is neither male nor female."

"What does that mean?" asked Evelyn.

"I haven't the slightest idea. Her letters to me were always full of things that had no meaning, and of words that had no significance in the way she used them. She is a queer person, most queer."

"She'll be back now."

"Why?"

"The war . . . every one will be back."

"But India is safe."

"I don't know . . . revolution possibly, with England at war."

"That's so . . . she may be back." And in Kirby's heart he wondered what it would mean to him if she came. Could her coming by any chance mean their reconcilia-

tion, and their reunion? He faintly hoped for it, even while the logic of his mind told him that she was not good for him. No experience in India, or elsewhere, could make her over, and render her a beneficent influence in his life. And this meaningless message on the postal card was not reassuring! Again the matter of sex, and again its pretended denial. By contrast with Becky, whose personality was conveyed to him so vividly by this postal card, there was Charlotte! Ah, Charlotte whose mind was clear like fresh running water, whose heart was devoted and free, whose love was constant and creative! Why did his thoughts ever wander from her? And for Becky, the enigmatic and self-inverted sorceress: the hard little vulgarian, the selfish, reckless, voluptuary, the plebeian soul draped in the silks of the man she married for money!

Evelyn went on to say that if he would postpone his party for a few days that Rene and her husband were coming up from Baltimore, and that would add much to the occasion. "They will that," said Kirby. "When will they be here?"

"Pretty soon. I can't tell exactly. But I'll let you know, and you can have it any time, can't you?"

"Any time."

Kirby went forth into the streets, which were stirring and voluble with the news of the war; even the children voiced its presence in the world in cries and gambols. He went about observing it all. What Mitch Miller, his boyhood chum, had said to him more than twenty years ago came back to him in this alien atmosphere of New York, so alien to all that he knew then, to all that Mitch had ever known, who now for so many years had slept in that old cemetery which overlooked the Sangamon River in

Illinois. Mitch had decried all war, except war for country, for its defense, and now influences were flinging themselves afar to transform and pull away all former logics and ideals. Would Kirby under any circumstances enter the war? He felt the spirit and the convictions of his grandfather stir within him, who did not believe in the Civil War, and thought it unnecessary and avoidable. This quarrel in Europe seemed in no way his quarrel, but the quarrel of merchants and traders, the competitive onslaught of mercantilists, as Adam Smith had taught him to believe all wars to be. No, his spirit of detachment would control him in any case, as it had always informed his life of thinking and observation. He would watch the war and see what it meant; and study those numerous Americans, war spirits and adventurers who would stream forth to Europe to take one side or the other, and thus achieve a realization of themselves out of the boredom and routine of life at home and in peace.

As for himself what should he do? Should he marry Charlotte, but why? Should he settle himself to a life time of thought and study? If only he could finance himself, and escape the office which since his successful handling of the will case had grown more attractive to clients. If only the will case were decided favorably to him, and his financial problems were thereby settled. If he could in a word only establish his life, and having done so unfold it without distraction to some full and significant blossoming. This day of excitement aroused all these thoughts. And he went home to tell his mother the news, and to read in Charlotte's eyes the calm assertion that the war could not break their life of peace. She was out in the yard feeding the chickens, and looking after the flowers.

How calm and well ordered her life was! How his turbulent and restless and unsatisfied nature impugned her wise assimilation of daily things! Was he just to her? And so thinking he sat on the door step and watched her and was soothed at last by her laugh and her happy interest! If he could only be at peace, be single-hearted like Charlotte; if he could only enter into her life of simple delight with all his soul! Would that not solve existence for him?

CHAPTER XXVI

The war had come on indeed. The massing and moving of enormous bodies of men affected Kirby's imagination so profoundly that he could see them and feel them. They were like great thunder clouds which reverberate their cannonading from agitated distances with the energy of their deadly velocity. Kirby read of the war and dreamed of it. The deaths of so many young men cut cruelly into the sensitive flesh of his being; and mystical dreams came to him at night; he could almost hear the tramp of the feet of the slaughtered as they passed over the pavement of eternity. Immortality took on a new credibility with him, not that man deserved another life, but that something inhered in man's nature which carried him beyond the shock of death. And this great mortality of the war multiplied the evidence of this potential power for survival. In the case of one death the footsteps of the departed made no ponderable proof; but so many going magnified the sound to the degree of audible proof of a place to which their wanderings and activities had been transferred.

His household was disturbed in various ways by the terrible world catastrophe which had seized every soul with some particular concern. Charlotte became anxious about a brother, of whom Kirby up to this time had never heard her speak; and she was trying to reach him by a

letter. All detached souls, those who had not succeeded in business, who had remained unmarried and unestablished in life, were likely to fly to Europe where there was adventure. Mrs. Kirby was communicating with Myrtle by cable; for she feared that the age-old hatred between Italy and Austria would break forth again. All in all there were slumbering fires everywhere, which the great breeze stirred by the Angels of Hatred and Violence would fan into devouring flame.

Myrtle was quite confident that she would be well off where she was. They might go to Switzerland later, in whose rocky fastnesses of mountains armies were not wont to come. But for the time being all was well where she was. Yet Mrs. Kirby could not be at peace, with her daughter so far away; and as the dispatches pouring upon their attention daily, battered at her somewhat unequal health. Kirby was very tender toward her, and looked after her well-being with all possible attention; while Charlotte with the affection of a daughter and with her wonted skill relieved her of the daily cares which disturbed her now more than ever. Very often of mornings she did not come to breakfast now, though she had never greatly fancied the habit of having the morning meal in bed. On these occasions Charlotte would bring coffee and toast to her, and enliven her thoughts with her laughing vitality and her generous attention. "You are a dear, Charlotte," Mrs. Kirby often said. "Without you and Skeet I don't know what I should do."

She wished the two to be married now. All ideas that she had ever had that there was any disparity between her son and this girl, who had made her own way in the world, had vanished from her mind. What better partner

could her son have? And she was still fearing that he would take some fancy that would leave Charlotte adrift, save for herself. She had decided that in any case she would not part with Charlotte, but would take her abroad with her, or wherever she went, if her son did not assert a superior right to have her.

He was thinking now of marriage, too; not that he wished to be married; but the war had brought to his mind many imperatives of life, as danger and the prospect of change impel people to duties and to settlements that in happier days are postponed.

Charlotte did not hear from her brother, and she gave up the quest with a laugh. "If I can't find him, I can't; he was always a wild one, and now I expect he will run away. It's the only chance he will likely ever have to see Europe."

"When did you see him last?" asked Mrs. Kirby.

"It must be three years anyway; and then I had not seen him since we broke up at home."

"What made you break up at home?"

"Well, my mother died and we just scattered, for our father could do nothing for us. . ."

Mrs. Kirby had often seen this happen in Marshalltown; and in the case of her own children what was it but a sudden falling from the nest both by her son and daughter, before their wings had been trained. She had gone away, too, leaving her husband to live as he might. It was all in search of life, in that selfish thing of making one's own career and happiness; and yet what else was there in life to do? With these warring nations every one of them had set their eyes upon a perfection, a destiny, that in itself was beautiful, or made for the consumma-

tion of national dreams, and yet it was the clash of these aspirations that now deluged Europe with blood. Could life be otherwise with this mystical urge stirring in the very depths of human souls?

Kirby had no interest in the war, and only hatred for it, seeing in it forces that would drench the world with retarding influences for years to come. He had seen and lived through the evils that followed the Civil War, and interpreted them in the light of his father's life, who had suffered in his career on the score of an adverse feeling to that contest; and he had never forgotten the stern moralism of his grandfather, who hated slavery but deplored the blood with which it was expunged. . . As of old and in harmony with his nature and genius, he felt himself to be the spectator; and his experiences had shaped him the better to play that part. There was Goethe, too, who had always exercised such an influence upon his imagination: did not Goethe pursue his scientific studies while Napoleon ravaged Europe? And did not Goethe welcome the great Corsican to Weimar and receive him with the accolade: "Vous étes un homme?" Kirby was therefore driven into studies; he took up the Bible in an examination of its war preachments and its influence upon western culture, and he also went to the great Hindu hymns to compare the two treatments of the experience of war. He had now lived through a disastrous marriage, through the bitterness and the battle of a legal career in Chicago, through consuming passion and idealism for Becky Norris, through defeat in hope of her, through soul humiliation and terror after he had come to New York, through long brooding over the loss of Becky, and the wreck of the beauty which she meant to him.

He would now live, whether he wished it or not, through the drama of a great war. He could exercise no choice in the matter, no more than the warrior prince Arjuna in the great hymn, could avoid the conflict that was enacting itself before him; and what had happened to him in these late years would happen to the nations now at war: peace and hope and loveliness would perish, and what was it for?

Often of evenings they sat together going over these subjects and reading side by side the Bhagaved Gita and the Bible. The clergy as usual were loud for war. They were counseling destruction of the hated Germans, whose philosophers had made the violent wine of hate which energized the war. And was their spirit less . . . that of these followers of Christ? For whether it is better to advocate hate before war or after it has come, who shall say?

"What do we find in this old Hebrew book?" asked Kirby as he read and expounded it to them. "The favored race shall eat the Philistine's bread, they shall drink his milk and take his flocks, and despoil his land, and make him a slave, and kill his children. To what end? That the Lord may be known as the Lord. That the favored race may be supreme . . . and doesn't the German say that he is the favored race? It's a repetition of this same old false claim to superiority, to be vindicated and established by the sword. It's the old story of getting on top."

"Life is not made by any single exercise of the soul," said Mrs. Kirby, "but the whole of it comes from many different exercises. Life is a pattern to which the Hebrews

contributed their Jehovah and their hunger for life and supremacy."

"If the pattern could only be woven beautifully all through," said Kirby.

"It is . . . you can't read any of this without a thrill, and that is beauty."

"We are cannibals, then."

"We are. We are devouring and we are devoured; and the new life comes from this succession of sustenance."

"You are a wise sophist, mother. But anyway, you cannot escape the conclusion that everything is not equally good. For example is not the attitude of Arjuna superior to anything in the Bible? He faced a war in which loved comrades and friends were on both sides, as happened in the civil war. He had to decide whether he would slay those to whom he owed love and duty. To break family ties was a wrong, to leave the people in bondage was an injustice at which his soul revolted; and so what path should he take? He ended his reflections not by investing what he did with the will of God as a man of war, not by claiming for his side of the war, as that side was thrust upon him, a divine purpose and righteousness. But the immediate thing was before him: the war. How should he handle the matter? He therefore fought without passion, without anger or hatred, without identifying his interest in the war with the interest of God; he saw all sides, but was not repelled by the repellent, or attracted by the attractive . . . he became one with the divine life by the subdual of all regard for the result, by an overcoming of all outgoing energies. And so he won peace and union with the divine in this way."

"But what kind of a soldier did he make?"

"Well, suppose the French should wage this war in this spirit and the Germans should worst them as they would, and as they will anyway, what would be the figure put into this pattern of life that you have been talking about, what would be the contribution made to the world's spiritual vision and energy? It is incalculable. . . . As it is we have the war waged in the name of God, as they have always been since the supremacy of Christianity, and under the very inspiration of this Bible, and the teachings of Jesus himself, whose words lend themselves to this violence in the name of righteousness and for its success. In other words you have Occidental civilization in the death throes because of its own informing spirit; and the time has come when this should be given a quietus, in order that your pattern may take on a different hue and a different figure."

"Very well, what does all this mean to you, in your life and what you are to do?"

"It tells me to be a spectator. I should not do my part if not seeing justice violated, not seeing bondage imposed, not seeing anything involved but a struggle for trade, if I yet should enter the war, even if America got into it. If I were then forced in, forced to choose a worse alternative than to go to war, then I should have to forget all these values which were not at stake, and fight through the experience of being in war that I did not approve, hoping to win some Yoga, or union, by that, whatever it might be. That's all. I should have to forget the things that repel me: this fight for trade which is the merchant, and not mine; this grabbing of territory which will do me no good, and do those no good who get it, and go ahead with my own soul's problems encom-

passed and modified by these things which are not mine, except as I make them mine by handling them in the right way."

"The war will be over in a month, I think," said Charlotte. "The Germans are going to take Paris, and that will end it."

"I am not so sure," observed Mrs. Kirby. "It is much talked in Europe that the French profited by the Franco-Prussian war, and that they have the best understanding of the geography of countries of any power in Europe, and besides they have been getting ready for this. Then the entrance of England: it is a long struggle, I fear, and a terrible one. And they would be glad to get us into it. They got us into the Philippines, and thus dragged us away from our isolation, and they want our riches and our strength in the world politics that are the fashion. It may be a very long struggle. One power after another declaring war on Germany makes an early termination doubtful. It is terrible."

Day after day they talked the war, and meanwhile a great restlessness had come upon Kirby. He was obliged to summon the forces of a long practiced concentration to go on with his studies. He often went to see Evelyn or the Walters, for the latter perched in their studio seemed above the disturbing events which were beginning to make the whole world mad. That was to be an artist, and how well Francine played the part, who looked at him as Aphrodite might have done, calmly alert to his turmoil of mind. She would laugh at him, and prepare him a drink, and show him a new picture. Was she not very much like Charlotte who, with the first concern about her brother, had come to an equilibrium in the face of daily

details of horror, accepting them as one would look at a play? But often Kirby thought of the spiritual waste of the war. Lives would be lost by the millions; but what of the countless minds which would be blunted, robbed of their concentration, paralyzed in their energies, corrupted in their purity of calmness and good will. That would be the waste of years to come.

The will case was not yet decided in the court of review, and Kirby's activities at his office were confined to the daily things that he had to do about his mother's affairs. Sometimes there was nothing to do with them, and then it was that he felt that his mother was just sustaining him while he went on with the leisure she was giving him for the developing of his mind and the cultivating of his art as a writer.

"You are a slow growing oak," she said to him one day. "But some day I look for you to produce all at once. That book which you printed has promise. It has the germs in it of much greater things. Meanwhile, do not be restless, do not try to anticipate your season, or mature before your time."

What a wise friend she had become! It was like a regeneration of her whole being in which he had figured as the controlling influence.

It was in late August one time when he decided to go up town to see Bob Hayden, whose stay in New York would not be protracted much longer. It would soon be time for him to take his way back to the tasks and the associations at home, which year by year were growing more irksome and of less interest. Kirby had called upon the Walters, finding them both hard at work painting, side by side in fellowship. Was he not wise to have married

a woman much younger than himself, whose thinking and tastes he could help to establish. The windows of the studio were all up, for the heat was sickly and almost fetid, as of a room overheated and not ventilated. Francine was dressed in a blue jacket and skirt made for her work, and already streaked with paint where she had wiped the brushes, and where colors and oil had been spilled; and she was laughing, as she and her husband talked of their work and the little things that passed. "Oh, here's Skeeters Kirby," she said joyously as she let him in. "You look hot." "I am hot," and he mopped his forehead. "It's not hot up here. Come in and we'll shake up a drink."

He went on to tell them that he was going up town to see Bob Hayden and that he wanted to give a party out at his mother's house.

"I want to give it for Bob. He is going away before long. We can put you all up for the night. We'll have a supper under the trees and a great talk; and if it's hot then we'll go swimming. And all together make it a feast; and have a great talk about everything there is in the world."

"That will be fun," said Francine. "And Rene will be here in a few days. Of course, you want her?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Evelyn, I suppose, and all the husbands."

"Husbands accepted."

"How about your will case? That was a great feat, that crossexamination you made of the widow. You deserve to win. But you know when we got home that day, Francine and I almost wept."

"Why?"

"To see you sweat and grunt with that load, when your real life is that of an artist. Both of us thought that you are the best illustration in the world of an artist man trying to overcome American difficulties."

"What are American difficulties? Artists in all times and lands have had something."

"True enough. But the American difficulties are worse, because chances are so great here for material success that not to take them excites the opposition of the community. Poverty is harder to bear because it is considered so unnecessary and evokes no sympathy. And the artist himself feels all this and undergoes a failure of faith in himself, and he loses concentration. He grows to feel ashamed. That's the reason we thought that you printed that book of yours under a pseudonym."

"It was."

Kirby did not like to talk of these things, for he was under the conviction that in his present situation he could go on if he could only master his forces. His mother's support made all that possible. "I think I'll win that case eventually, and then I may do something. Meanwhile I am reading enormously, and thinking my way along."

When he left the Walters' he walked through Union Square, where on this hot afternoon the loungers were sitting, displaying such varied evidences of the derelict in life: the old shoes carefully polished, the torn coats; the fixed stares, the reading of newspapers, all the idling and waiting of discarded men. Bootblacks were walking about trying to pick up a little money; women and children sat or hurried here and there. One man that Kirby passed was bent over beating one index finger upon the

other and saying to himself in a manner of repeated calculation:

"No home, no wife, no children, nothing." He was an abject creature and Kirby's heart moved in his breast. He knew everything that this man was suffering. . . The newsboys were shouting the latest reports of the war; and as Kirby turned the corner in to Fifth Avenue, he saw ahead of him the balcony where he and Becky had stood. Sick, yellow leaves drifted about his feet, and the devitalized sunlight shone before him. And all these crowds, as in the days long passed when he walked this avenue in the agony of thought, and wondered if he were to become a wanderer in the world, like the poor man who was counting his disasters upon his fingers! Was he now so much better off than this creature, and what was life to be after all his days were tolled off? There were Charlotte and his mother; but if Becky had only proved to be the woman that he thought her in that first Spring! This thought seemingly was never to die!

He found Bob Hayden walking the floor, dressed only in his night shirt. He had not been out of the flat as yet. He, too, was thinking of what he could make of existence: that problem that never ends until life itself ends. "Do you know what I am, Skeet? I am a tranced cocoon, trying to think what life will be, and to fashion it, and I can't. A cocoon doesn't walk, I know. But a man at the cocoon stage does walk; the walking age comes on one. I often think of Nietzsche, who walked more and more as the madness came on him."

"How are you feeling otherwise?"

"I am not well, and this war just grills hell out of me. I read about it and think of it all the time. The Germans

are in Liège and in Brussels, the Japs are in the mess now. And we would be in it if we were bristlers for our own sovereignty."

"How so?"

"Why the English have our commerce all tied up. They have consuls at every port to chalk what can be shipped and what can't. And if we were England and not ourselves in this situation we would ship or shoot. We want to buy the German ships in order to relieve shipping conditions, and in order to build up a merchant marine; and Russia, England and France won't let us. I wish I had a few thousand dollars in order to go off somewhere and be a hermit, make my own beer, and grow my own tobacco."

"So do I."

"That part of withdrawal is not for you. You are too young. But these things have come on me, when I was ready for something else and not this. A man's life is prepared for one thing and not for all things, and the tragedy of it is that the thing for which his life was prepared is often shoved aside by great events for which he has no mind or ability or vision. Take Hawthorne, he built up his life to one thing, and the civil war came and shoved it aside and himself aside, as he felt. That's me."

"What do you wish to do that you can't do?"

"I wanted to go on building up this republic; and now nothing that I have ever stood for will be regarded. The crowds have wandered on to the next freak of the side show, and here I stand and bark in vain. And this war will set liberty back fifty years, if not longer. The censorship is on us already; and you will see that when we get thoroughly mad we will be madder than England, just

because our interest in this matter is not so real as hers. Imitative interests make imitative wrath, which is not guided by reality but is goaded and called afar by fanciful occasions of indignation. Oh, we'll get into the war eventually. There is no Thomas Jefferson here now, and no Anglophobia of moment; but underneath we are as surely controlled by the tight little island as possible. I remember Altgeld years ago fulminating against England, and saying that one more campaign would bury the British gold standard which had withered the hopes of mankind. It was funny to me even then, for I was a gold man, and suspected Bryan of a deep fanatical malice, a spurious leadership founded on restlessness and ambition for food for his ego. Altgeld! and the British lion didn't know he was around. He was a gnat lighting on the thick turf of the mane. So there is no Jefferson here . . . and no sovereignty here; and we'll get in. My feelings are with getting in. We owe it to France; besides I'd rather live in a world controlled by London than by Berlin. It comes to a matter of what your blood tells you."

"My God, what an awful thing it will be if we get in."

"How do I know? You're always talking the Bhagavad Gita. Is it reserved to you alone to act, but to disregard the fruits of action in the reaching of Yogas? Hasn't the world as much right to accept war and go into it and come out of it purified, or disciplined as you have to work through things as an individual? If it's good for a man to know shame and loss and hate and envy and poverty and defeat, isn't it good for men en masse to know these things, and to know them in the world sense, which may give them vaster meanings and bring vaster

results because they are experienced en masse? What do you think of cosmic Yogas? What is the world learning as a world which it cannot learn by individuals here and there learning it?"

Kirby thought this might be the secret of life, of the cosmic scheme: a discipline of masses and races, even of the whole world, one spiritual Yoga after another for the world at large until mankind as an aggregate became learned and exalted. And perhaps God as a mind, a soul, apart from his existence as an energy, was a being who had projected Himself beyond this world after repeated lives in which different lessons were learned, and all secrets of the soul's potentialities were worked out and possessed in the living; and who having come to know all things in this way also forgives all things and sympathizes with all things.

Kirby studied the face of his friend, and saw in it such suffering and wisdom, such helplessness, too, between the vision which was his and the power physical and spiritual to carry what he knew into action. Why should he come to him for solace when Hayden himself needed sustention? But it was a sustention, after all, which the world could not give.

Wishing to direct Hayden's mind to happier things he said: "I have been down to see the Walters on my way up here, and have been talking to them about giving a party out to our place, where we can shut ourselves out from the world for a time with talk and feasts and a good time in general, and I want you to come. We'll have Evelyn; and Rene Aldrich is coming up from Baltimore. Besides, I want you to see how I live now; and Charlotte is there and my mother. What do you think of that?"

"I think it will be very fine. But somehow I don't like to mix any more. Man delights me not nor woman neither. The time comes when people pass us up, as we feel like passing them up; and I am there."

"You are not there, and never will be, and you must come."

"Very well, there are reasons why I should: I am going west soon and I should like to see your place. And perhaps it would be well now to have our symposium on What is a Republic."

"Yes. Well, then, come out to stay. Why don't you just close out here and make our place your headquarters until you go home? Can't you come out tomorrow, and perhaps we can have the party a few days later. I shall have as many stay as possible, for we have lots of rooms and can take care of all of you."

Hayden was glad to get out of the city, and they arranged his coming accordingly. Then Hayden dressed and they went forth to dinner.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was the tenth of September. Hayden was lingering at the house of Kirby on Long Island, both because he was resting and having daily happiness, and because he was waiting for the party to be given for which he had come from the city. Rene Aldrich had not arrived from Baltimore, but was coming this day; and the servants were getting ready for the house guests: the Walters, Evelyn and her husband, and perhaps Halliwell. They would arrive about four o'clock, and there was to be a supper under the apple trees, for the moon was full, and the air like summer. Tomorrow they would walk and drive, and perhaps take a swim, if the temperature didn't lower. Charlotte was working in great expectation of the event: rooms had to be given the finishing touches, and she was overseeing the work in the kitchen. Mrs. Kirby entered with great enthusiasm into the preparations. She had by this time had many talks with Hayden under the apple trees, and she was looking forward to the arrival of these artist Americans who had seen life here and elsewhere, and who were coming to enjoy the hospitality of herself and her son, and to enrich his life by their presence. As to Evelyn, Mrs. Kirby was not so sure: Evelyn had been Becky's friend and she had been the bearer of tidings to Kirby which were evil enough, even if they warned and helped him. Anyway, there is

always one in a party not up to the level of the others. The rest suited her taste, as far as she knew about them.

Whenever she had the chance, Charlotte went to talk with Hayden where he sat under one of the trees. She was drawn to him, by his great intelligence, and by his sympathy. She said to herself: what a beau he must have been in his day; as for that what a beau he would be now, if he only took the trouble to be one. And he talked to her about the war, about love and men and women, while she hemmed napkins or worked at embroideries. He also followed her about as she took care of her chickens; and stood by laughing at her as she climbed trees, or ran to the garden for flowers or vegetables. "Gee!" he said to Kirby one day, "That girl is a wonder. If I were a young fellow I'd steal her under your eyes."

He walked about with her, holding her arm affectionately. At breakfast time he came in the room with a laugh and a joyous salutation to her, giving her a good morning kiss on the cheek or the brow. They had become the greatest friends. "That woman is worth all the Beckys you could pile on this place. Wake up, Skeeters Kirby, and see it."

Mrs. Kirby was equally fascinated with Hayden. "Why did you stay all this time in the hot city, when you could have been here near the water and these trees which you enjoy so much? It is too bad. And next summer when you come you must stay here all the time. You can see what a delight you are to my son and to Charlotte." They talked of the war day by day; for Hayden studied the dispatches diligently; and then by the time Mrs. Kirby

had gone the morning rounds, and Charlotte had all her duties attended to, the talk began under the trees.

The censorship had become almost complete, but there were reports of the German attack at Le Fere seventy-five miles from Paris. The city having been bombarded was preparing for a siege. General Pau was credited with having won a victory over fifty thousand Germans near Peronnes. Austria had lost one hundred thousand men in the defense of Lemberg. The air fleets were working havoc. The Belgians had opened the dikes; and the great battle of the Marne was on. Hayden read Kipling's new poem to them, which began:

For all we have and are,
For all our children's fate,
Stand up and meet the war,
The Hun is at the gate.

"This makes me laugh," said Hayden. "No one has been a greater fomenter of war than Kipling. And he writes and has written as if the English were the only people who had the right to start a war. DeWet has started a rebellion in South Africa, and don't we all remember the part that Kipling took when Oom Paul tried to win independence for the Boer Republic? What is a republic? Are you going to get into this war, Skeeters?"

"Why should I?"

"For fun. If I were your age I'd go over there and become a flyer. What an experience up there among the clouds shooting at Germans and perhaps taking the grand tumble and ending the great futility."

"Are you so much against the Germans?" asked Mrs. Kirby.

"No, I just feel something in my blood which corresponds to taking sides with some member of my family against an outsider. For the rest I fancy I see the whole thing, and see what the Germans feel and why."

He had shaved and dressed at last in preparation of the guests who were arriving at four. The fine points of his face came out when his beard had been freshly removed, and the brightness of his great eyes were enhanced by the expected association of kindred spirits, and happy intercourse. He might be an ill man, but he did not betray his feelings. There was something greatly masterful in his figure and manner, as he parted with Kirby, who was going to the station to meet the guests, saying that he would walk by the water, until he came back.

When they arrived he was across the grounds sitting under one of the trees and he watched the company enter with their luggage, and Charlotte at the door to help them. After a while Kirby came out followed by Charlotte; and later Mrs. Kirby appeared leading the guests to this place where the rest were. It was a perfect afternoon in September, with a soft wind from the sea, stirring the leaves which still retained much of their greenness. "It is a fine thing to have this party, Charlotte," said Hayden, "and so far as it is given for my happiness I am a privileged being. We don't make enough of life. And there is a cruelty about the passing of time, when it is marked by failure of others to help us make the most of it . . . in delights such as this, which can be had where there is the will."

Evelyn, Francine, Rene, walking with Mrs. Kirby, were now approaching them, followed by the Walters and Mr. Lyman. Halliwell evidently had not come. "Look at

them, Charlotte," he said. "Is there anything more beautiful than a woman, speaking of her as you would of a picture or a piece of statuary? They look like blooded greyhounds, so slim and svelte, so sleek, and believe me to be treated like blooded greyhounds, who are all right when stroked, but quick with their teeth when crossed. Any of them will snap your hand, Mr. Skeeters Kirby, if you are not careful."

"I know that," and he glanced at Hayden.

"And so look out for Charlotte."

"I thought you had me down as one of the gentle kind that you could do anything with," she said.

"I have you down as one of the gentle kind who can do anything with anyone else."

"Oh!"

"Now if Burne-Jones were here what a picture he could paint. We need a few leopards to be sure to complete the scene, one to walk beside that woman in gray crepe, and a panther perhaps beside that one dressed in light pink."

"That's Francine and Rene."

The company now reached the place where the rest were awaiting them, and the introductions to Hayden were given. Rene took a seat by Kirby and began to ask him about Charlotte. "Who is she?"

"My mother's secretary."

"Very sweet."

"A wonderful help all around."

"And you?"

"Oh, nothing at all."

Charlotte arose at last and went to the house to attend to the last details for the serving of the supper.

Hayden was talking to Walters and Lyman, with the women sitting near drinking in what he had to say. It was the war; for this was the uppermost subject everywhere now.

"How can war be prevented, Mr. Hayden?" asked Rene.

"Well, not by laws, nor even by treaties, nor even by commercial mechanisms making for free and fair trade, though the latter as pure mechanism would help; but by having the majority against war, because their minds have been rid of the illusion that war somehow, some way, has a divinity in it, a mystical something which shapes the ends of the world to good. That is an illusion. You never knew of a war that did any good. And the reason they have not done more harm is because the stream of life is so strong and rich that nothing interferes with it much or injures it much."

"Isn't the majority against war?" asked Francine. "I think the German emperor drove his people into this war."

"That's it, drove them, which is to say persuaded them and so made them as much for war as himself. It was so with the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War. The subtle and masterful spirits play upon the mob. If it isn't an emperor and his clique, it's a business gang and their machinations. It makes no difference about that. But what I was going to say about the mob, the majority, is this: you will never stop intemperance of any sort or vice of mind or body, of living or thinking, speaking or acting by laws, but by bringing enough people to see that such things are no good. The mind and the desires have to be clear of illusion and false opinion before you can set the world in a new place of better life.

If you had the majority clear headed on this matter of war no one could start a war, whether it were an emperor or a faction; just as you couldn't by some prearranged design get the people of America to be drunk on a given day, and just as you couldn't even get enough of them drunk to compel the rest to get drunk."

"I think you are right," said Lyman. "For doesn't the constitution framed by the fathers and the uncles that we are asked to revere, contain all sorts of checks against war . . . war commenced by a state for example; and checks against appropriations; and checks against abuses in times of war."

"Yes, and what one of them was ever obeyed? We saw every one of them trampled in the Civil War, and in the Spanish War. And if you will look up the letters that were written at the time the constitution was under consideration, written by Robert Yates and John Lansing, by Edmund Randolph and Elbridge Gerry and by others you will find all sorts of forecasts made about this country and the organic law they were fastening upon it: the danger of the Federal Courts, the danger of the mob, the danger of factions, the danger of the legislative power. It was Morris who said that it was foolish to hope to bind legislators by oaths to support the constitution; for having sworn to support it, they would then swear its meaning to be whatever suited their purpose."

"There is something deeper to me than all this technical stuff," said Walters. "Of course if they make a law, and the law expresses the mob then you have the evil indeed. But what I see is a growing tendency to control people in their thoughts and lives by law; and the important thing with me is to retain what we have left of local self-govern-

ment. I am from Virginia, my father was in the war on the southern side, in the army of Lee; and he fought believing that liberty was at stake, and I believe it, too. It's always the mob, the mediocrities that civilization has to fear; and the way to keep them down is to divide the power of government so that they cannot get the advantage."

"Is that really true?" asked Hayden. "Couldn't states do anything to liberty they chose, acting as states, without the power of centralism?"

"They could try it, but the trial would be easier met. The point is that every society is divided into sects, factions, the rich and the poor, the debtors and the creditors, the manufacturing and the landed interests, the inhabitants of this and the other district, the followers of this and the other political leader, the disciples of this or the other religious leader, and the adherents of this or the other quack or real reformer; and when these groups become majorities they will impose upon the minorities in any way they want to, constitution or no constitution. The only remedy is to divide the community into so great a number of interests and parties, that a majority will not have at any given time a common interest separate from that of the whole, or of the minority. And thus to have the country divided into states was just the thing, as it let the states act according to their interests, tastes, according to the influence of the soil and the climate, not controlled by distant states where the soil, the stocks, the tastes, the beliefs, were different."

"Well, I say what I said about war, in substance," said Hayden, "that what we want is ideas. And if this is to be a government of laws and not men, which is absurd, be-

cause laws are made by men, and we all know by what men and how, why not go to something real and have it a government of ideas and not mobs, not factions, reformers and demagogues."

"I think," said Kirby, "that what the fathers so-called had in mind was the free soul of man, the individual, not as a subject or victim of taxation, of unjust imprisonment, of enforced worships and censored lips, though it was this too; but rather as a soul who had the right to the freedom of his spirit, which we'll say taxation might affect, which imprisonment might trammel, which worships might corrupt and stultify, which silence might poison, or force into falsehoods. That's the thing. I fear our democracy is going to pieces; and that pretty soon we shall demonstrate our freedom by the laxity of manners shown by a vice president cleaning his nails while presiding over the senate. The president may wear white flannel trousers and a silk shirt, but he will eat with his knife after signing the highest tariff bill that the manufacturers can put together."

"And all this talk about respect for laws!" said Hayden. "By those who know that the law-making power has overstepped its province, and that the cry must be kept up to bring about any sort of support of foolish laws. I wouldn't advocate respect for the laws, but to make the laws respectable."

"Look here," said Bob, addressing Francine, "are you bored?"

"I should say not. But I am starved."

"The supper is coming," said Kirby. And almost immediately it was served. The moon was well above the hill to the east; but Kirby, to add color and charm to the

scene, had stretched wires upon which Chinese lanterns had been hung; and he lighted them now while the servants were serving the food.

"How pretty those lanterns are there under this sky, this moon," said Rene. "Oh if I could only go to China. I never get tired of reading of China and its people. Their poetry is so wonderful, too, and their pictures and all they do; and their life is all beautiful etiquette and ceremony and respect for lovely details. They are so calm and wise, and have endured so long, having existed long before Moses got mad and broke the ten tables because he saw the golden calf being worshiped."

"A fine figure that, Mrs. Aldrich: reformers always break all the laws when they get mad," said Hayden.

"It infuriates me to think of the way the Chinese have been treated," said Francine. "Think of these cheap missionaries going over there."

"What can stop this?"

"Repaganization," said Kirby quickly.

"Did you hear that Francine?" asked Rene.

"What?" for at the moment Francine was talking to Charlotte and Mrs. Kirby.

"Skeet advocates repaganization as a means to save China and, I suppose, America, too."

"Yes, America first," he said. "For while we have done a lot to break China, I don't think it can be done entirely."

"What would you do to repaganize it?"

"I think it has already started. We are dancing or we have been. The boys and girls who are coming out of the colleges now are regular clippers. They are up on biology and everything. They are vital, ironic, courageous, fully informed about the history of religion, many

of them persuaded that life is art. And so they dance and give Greek plays and swim and row and walk, and live in the open, and the girls fellow with males and have romances . . . and in short live. The country is full of them, and I have hopes on account of them."

The champagne cup had been passed from time to time, and the party was beginning to show the effect of the wine. There was much laughter and talk on all hands. Rene turned to Hayden and asked him whom he considered America's greatest man.

"Well," he said, "if a man writes a great book, he is great to that extent. If he also architects a fine building he is great in that respect and is thus two-fold great. And so if I were to pick out America's greatest man, it would be some one who did more than one thing and did them all well. And it would be Benjamin Franklin. I put him above Washington, because he was equal to Washington in the moral qualities which made Washington great. He had great courage, will, patience, endurance and faith in life. He was greater than Jefferson, because more a man of action, while remaining Jefferson's peer in all the things in which Jefferson excelled. He was greater than Lincoln, inasmuch as he surpassed Lincoln as a thinker, and was not below him in moral excellence. He was our greatest all around man. He was an expert swimmer, and a teacher of swimming; he was a printer, a founder of newspapers and magazines; he was a sound philosopher of the prudential type; he made valuable experiments in electricity; he invented stoves and watertight compartments, and bifocal glasses; he lighted and paved streets, founded the postal system, was a wise legislator and governor; he speculated as to the theory of

colors; he was a member of all the learned societies of Europe and as famous a man as Voltaire; he was a grand old libretarian. . . ."

"And libertine, too," interrupted Evelyn.

"Yes, he was that, but he took care of his natural son, who was afterwards governor of New Jersey. He helped to write the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. He raised millions of dollars in France for the American cause. He traveled back and forth on the ocean when he was in his seventies, all for the sake of his country. He was a gallant and a lover. By damn, he was a good pagan, and since we are to have a repaganization of the country, I here and now propose that we take him for our patron saint."

"He was an artist," said Kirby. "He understood better than any American that even government is an art having a relation to poetry, for like poetry it is a wise inventing, and a wise harmonizing all the time; and it is like music, too, which is played because feet wish to dance and in time with dancing feet. Your sons of Paine become gray eyed infidels and wranglers, and your sons of Jefferson become doctrinaires dreaming of millenniums and striving to compress the whole of life into one liberty, or program. But your sons of Franklin see life in large, and they are the descendants of Leonardo, too."

"But how can you have art in government?" asked Mrs. Kirby. "With the population that we have, and the stocks we are producing? Kansas where there is no alcohol under the law, yet where insanity is so prevalent; and the great cities where the poor foreign breed is multiplying?"

"There is something I'd like to say," interrupted Rene, "When you pierce through the shell of laws and courts, and such things, you find a man and a woman, interlocked in the problem of raising children and at the same time trying to tolerate each other. Honestly, I am more sorry for men than I can say. We women are such a crooked lot, pretending to be frail and modest and all that; and we are as strong as tigresses and as shameless as we can be after we nail our man, and we have children in order to get the hip lock on the men, because the chivalric feeling controls the laws, and women work to get the laws on their side, which they can do by having children. The result is that the poor men are just worked to death, and all sorts of things happen to children in the breakdown of homes and as a result of the fight between husband and wife when the man finally sees that he is about all in and begins to wiggle one last leg as a protest and an attempt to get away. Under some scheme of life men and women might make an art of life and of government, if that is important, but how it can be done in America with our present marriage system I don't know."

"Well, what do you propose, Mrs. Aldrich?" asked Hayden.

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps a plan by which men and women don't have to live together after they don't want each other, while the children will be cared for when they separate. Look at this war: it looks as if boys were raised just to do the bidding of the mature men and people who have trade or business plans to carry out. And so let the taxes be raised to take care of the children; let our money go that way instead of being directly paid to the home; and thus let every generation live for itself."

"Well, here we are, almost at the end of the evening, and as near the end of our wits, and we haven't decided what is a republic."

"Tell us, Mr. Hayden," said Mrs. Kirby, "what a republic is."

"I am afraid the moon would be setting before I finished trying. But in a word we started to have a republic, we may yet be a republic, for we have the makings of a republic yet. It isn't the laws, the institutions. It's the hearts of the people. And there are many people like us who have a republic in our hearts. It may come with observation in the form of laws, but it is in the hearts of a people first. And perhaps the old timers had it more in their hearts than we have. I look up yonder at that moon, hung in that hollow tent of sapphire . . . and how much like a tent the sky looks now, and those stars so vastly separated! You know I have as much faith in life as I have in the laws that keep that moon where it is. I don't care what happens to me or to us or to the country, the mind of man, which is God, will gradually pull life along and up. The fit things of the mind will survive, even as fit beings survive, and by the same law; and with this difference: that the fit things of the mind have self-consciousness, and self-propulsion, and self-direction. All of these fit things of the mind are engaged in freeing the human soul, and thereby making republics, not merely of laws, but republics of spirits, universes of souls!"

"Oh, Mr. Hayden," exclaimed Mrs. Kirby, "what a faith! This is something for all of us to remember, and to treasure in our hearts forever."

"You flatter me," said Hayden. "You make it necessary for me to look at the champagne cup again."

It was now refreshed, and they drank, looking at the moon, and holding their cups to her soaring fire. Then they began to sing.

They arose from their seats at last to retire. It was long past midnight.

Charlotte went about seeing that every one was comfortably settled for the night. The wine had affected Kirby, and equally awakened Rene, who was admiring him more than ever, both when she was sensing him through his voice in the moonlight under the apple tree and later when they came into the glare of the lamps in the drawing room. Afterward as they all ascended to their chambers and as Kirby came into the hall he encountered Rene, who had simultaneously entered it. They looked at each other quickly; then he approached her, and she put her arms around his neck gently and gave him her lips. At that moment Charlotte at the far end of the hall, carrying blankets for some of the beds, saw what happened; and noiselessly and unknown turned into one of the rooms, her heart beating with anger and pain.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE was no breakfast until eleven o'clock; but as all the guests were departing, every one finally came to the table. Kirby preceded the others by a few minutes, finding Mrs. Kirby who had been up for some time. She came to her son anxiously and asked him:

"Where is Charlotte?"

"I don't know, why?"

"Because she is no where around, and I can't find her."

"She's gone for flowers or to attend to her chickens, perhaps for a walk."

"No! Were you kind to her?"

"Why, yes."

"Somehow I feel that she felt that she didn't fit in with this party, that she could not compete with the others. I am afraid that she has been hurt in some way. You are sure that you did nothing?"

"Nothing."

Rene entered now, and he remembered the kiss of last night. Perhaps Charlotte knew of that; but even so. Hayden descended at last, and the breakfast was served. Soon every one was gone; but Kirby persuaded Hayden to stay until later in the day. "She's a fine woman, Skeet, more sense and more devotion than any of these who were here. I felt all the time that she was looking upon herself as out-

classed. She was so silent, and I was watching her while she took care of every one. It hurt me, for she is pure gold, and you couldn't beat her anywhere in this world." Kirby and Hayden were sitting on the porch as the latter was speaking thus to Kirby. Mrs. Kirby came to them and with anxiety written on her face said:

"I am worried to death about Charlotte. Could she have run away, or perhaps gone to the bay and fallen in, or hurt herself while walking? I am terribly worried. Go down by the bay, Skeet, and look around."

The two men set off and tramped over the whole place. They climbed to the hill where the little cemetery was; they returned to the house and searched for her about the out buildings, the garden, everywhere. Finally Kirby went to Charlotte's room. All of her clothing was upon the hooks; nothing seemed to be missing. He opened the drawer of her dresser, but did not find her purse. One of her hats, too, was gone; and on further inspection a light cloak. How strange for Charlotte to do this, if she had made a disappearance. It was not like the calmness of her nerves, the stability of her emotions to indulge in anything as eccentric as this.

"Well, I suppose we could send out a searching party; but I don't like to do that," said Mrs. Kirby.

"No, not that," advised Hayden.

"Let's go in town and look for her."

"Look where? We might as well look for a needle in a haystack."

"Anyway you are going in; and I'll go along. That leaves you alone, mother."

"I don't mind that. I want to rest today; and besides we must find Charlotte."

The two men went into town in the afternoon, parting for the time at the Brooklyn Bridge where Hayden took the subway to the apartment of Murray Mitchell. Kirby went to his office, hoping that there might be a note or a message there for him which would clarify Charlotte's disappearance. There was neither; but among his letters there was a note from Becky . . . a poem rather sent him from Bombay:

> "We made a cross of our two bodies,
> You and I,
> And sealed our fate with love's stigmata."

He had no heart now to read the rest. . . . Charlotte was gone. And these verses which celebrated one of their nights sounded to him like words which recall events that have no substance in memory any longer, save that they have happened: we took a long walk that day or the like. Why should Becky go away and thus write him? And why would Charlotte go away? He had counted on her. Was there something in his nature which, while it drew women to him and held them for a time, yet soon exhausted itself and left their devotion emancipated from further concern? If anyone ever had a reason to cleave to him it was Charlotte; the simple and good heart; and yet she had deserted him too. Outside the news boys were crying the latest reports of the slaughter in Europe, the noise of the city welled up to his windows. Life seemed very terrible and bare, sterile and infinite like great spaces far beyond the earth. In the midst of his musings Mr. Kennedy entered and said: "You have been vacationing, I suppose. I have a little news for you. I

am sorry to say the court reversed your decree in the will case."

"Oh, hell. . . ."

"Yes, but not a hopeless defeat. The court directs a different form of decree for one thing; and also the taking of more evidence on some points."

"Then the general theory of the decree is not upset?"

"No . . . and I think the case can be settled now, all the law having been worked out."

He turned into his own room. Kirby was more disappointed than he imagined he would be for such an event. But why do things like this always happen when one has been happy and drinking life at the brim of the cup? Oh, if he could only be free. But free how? He sat down and began to think back, back to his law life in Chicago, back beyond that to his boyhood in Marshalltown, and his life shrouded in the mists of ten and twelve years of age with Mitch Miller in Petersburg. How long now he had been dead! How long had his grandmother and grandfather and his father been in sleep, and here he was in this office in New York perplexed with the same aches and longings and defeats. And there was the loss of Winifred . . . ah, Winifred these many years wasting to dust in England. And there was Alicia . . . the long search for love, the will and the faith which drove him to seek a heart and to be worthy of finding one; and Becky . . . how he had loved her! Now this little poem from Bombay was before him and he could look at it and repeat mechanically:

> "We made a cross of our two bodies,
> You and I,
> And sealed our fate with love's stigmata."

There was no meaning to anything, only struggle and suffering and war . . . this terrible war which somehow called to him. Should he do what Arjuna did? Should he enter it, and end life that way . . . how easily? He was about to call the opposing lawyer in the will case and see what could be done. He was too listless. The late hour and the wine had taken his edge for work away. Perhaps he should telephone his client, she might think that he had failed in duty and in skill some way. Perhaps he should assure her. He telephoned her to come in when she could, and he would take up the case again. It could be settled now, he thought. They were not defeated; they had won, having procured favorable rulings on the law. He hung up the telephone. Charlotte! was she lost to him? What else must he do to make a harmonious soul of himself? Very much. But what else in respect to Charlotte? Self sacrifice, something in the way of service to Charlotte, who had served him so devotedly. . . An airplane droned high up over the East River. He watched it from his window. How defiant it was of danger and death, yet trailed by both. What is the sensation of the aviator who sees the deep abyss of sunlight above him and the shadows of night and the treacherous earth below him?

Why not train for this sort of service in the war? What would it be like to sail over the panorama of Paris, to fight among the clouds, perhaps to be shot and to sink down with the wings of the monster shattered, to the great quietude . . . death, the sinking down always, but in this death all that experience so greatly magnified!

Perhaps Charlotte had gone to the war. She had been saying that it was selfish to be in comfort and safety here

while so many were suffering in Europe. There were many things she could do—yes, for Charlotte whose hands were so dexterous, and if she had gone should he not go? He closed his office and went into the street. He had just convenient time to meet Hayden at the Brevoort where they had planned to have dinner; then he was going to hurry back to Great Neck and tell his mother what he had done to find Charlotte. And what was that? He had telephoned to the little hotel near the Ritzdorf where they had lived at first; but she was not there. For the rest he had stared among the crowds as he had come to his office, and at the crowds on the streets as he went to the Brevoort . . . and what else could he do? There was no one in New York who knew Charlotte that he knew of. Perhaps she was in some place of war work, or some place where help was being organized for the war . . . and if so where could that be? Tomorrow and later he would look up these places.

As he entered the Brevoort a party of four, two men and two women brushed past him at the door. They seemed to be in more haste than he was. One of the women was Alicia; and Alicia was the queen of the group. She was dressed in green, with a snug hat with green trimmings, and green jewels to match. She was very self-sufficient and smiling, and in gay mastery of the table that they took. She saw Kirby and smiled at him with a subtly concealed patronization. How could she be happy, successful of spirit, in all this consequence of their separation, which had wounded him and left so many after effects? Evidently she was . . . and while he had lost Becky and then Charlotte, she had found some one, or many, perhaps, who served the uses of her vanity and her avidity of experience.

Bob Hayden came late, as Kirby was walking through the lobby. He had been telephoning his newspaper friends to look out for Charlotte but to make no publication of her disappearance. A search would be made of the hospitals, and of the various places where people were engaged in war activities. If she had not left New York, she would be found in this way. Perhaps she had gone back to Chicago to take up her life again with that employer who had used her. Yes, after all perhaps she loved him more than anyone; and this party and Skeeter's nature as she had seen it in association with other women had shown her that her real life was where she had left it when she came east to join Kirby.

"It's too bad," said Hayden. "I was more drawn to her than any woman I have seen in many a day. There is something about her so gentle and kind, so maternal and generous, so happy, natural, devoted. I can't bear to think that you would ever be unkind to her. And let me tell you something, Skeet . . . don't believe that stuff about women being slick and exploiting. . . I mean don't believe it of all of them, Charlotte is not that sort. And another thing: the Furies will get you if you don't play fair with a good woman. I have nights when I just roll about in agony of thought for the rotten way I have treated some of them. I wish to God I had let them get the best of me, rather than to have been cruel to keep them, as I supposed, from getting the best of me. Be big and brave with them. They are weaker than men until men turn them into beasts; then they can hold their own. But also their ghosts haunt one. Take my advice."

"I have always been good to Charlotte."

"All except you have never really given your heart to

her, while she has given you everything. If you won't give her any more than you do, go out and buy your sex favors; and get just what you pay for, and not what you don't pay for, and can't pay for without giving your heart interest."

"But I am very fond of Charlotte . . . and if I don't find her I think I shall go into the war."

"Go anyway. Crystallize your nature and mind that way. Precipitate your intellectual mists in that way. Suffer, fight, train, harden your thinking, clarify your vision. Do what Sophocles and Socrates did. If it comes to you that way do what Arjuna did. It may be better to give a service that is not required than to give one to your own country where it might be required. We may get into the war eventually; but you don't have to wait for that."

"I have been thinking of the flying service."

"Just the thing: thrilling and dangerous and very influential on the art of writing, allied to great rhythms. But in any case the more one lives the more one knows. I wish I could be in the war. That's the hell of age and bad health: one sees everything and thinks everything, but can act nothing. I'm off west tomorrow, back to my old grind and my nothingness."

Kirby looked at his friend. Perhaps after this supper he was never to see him again. Ashes were in his cheeks, purples under his eyes, the signs of great fatigue in his voice; and the gulf of life lay between them. They parted. Kirby went to Great Neck and Hayden to the apartment of his friend.

CHAPTER XXIX

The days went by, and Charlotte was not found. Mrs. Kirby was grieved beyond words and could think of nothing else; but also she was mystified. She talked to her son often begging him to give her an explanation of this strange behavior of Charlotte. She associated in her reasoning something of Kirby's fault with Charlotte's departure. She suspected that Charlotte might be going through a maternal experience, and if so Kirby should tell her, if he knew. This he denied. At last she began to look for some one else to do her secretarial work. But who could take Charlotte's place in all the manifold services with which she filled it?

In the mean while Kirby had brought about a settlement of the will case. He had made a fee of $25,000, one fourth of what he was counting on; but this seemed to be in keeping with the success of his life: something mediocre, not to the full, not what he had striven for and expected and deemed that he had earned. This was a little purse which made him somewhat independent. He could go back to the Rock River cabin, or some place like it, and live for the rest of his days and finish his studies and write what books came to him to write. But did he want to do that, retire to that seclusion? No, the world called to him, and life, and the city, even. He bought himself a microscope and began to study biology. He

plunged into chemistry and books on anthropology. And the days went by with great reading, and the making of notes and the writing of poems. Life after all was struggle and pain. No one was happy; and the best one could do was to use every day for self development, not to fail nor yield nor despair.

No one could predicate evil of this life without knowing what lay beyond it, without knowing what it was for. Pessimism was therefore philosophically unsound. It affirmed evil of life without knowing that it was related to an evil; for what it is related to determines its character. This life may be the using of human beings for which everything that happens to them on earth is adapted to some other life or end. It may not be the case, but to say that life is evil is to affirm the matter without enough facts to support the judgment. This was what Kirby had come to believe. He was not on the other hand an optimist, but as to the world of affairs a meliorist, as to the spiritual life of a man a self-culturist, and a seeker of beauty, which covered truth as well.

Charlotte had been gone six weeks when one morning he found a letter from her at his office. He tore it open almost with trembling hands and read:

"Dear Skeet: I am coming back sometime to get my clothes and so forth; or maybe I'll have you send them to me. But you haven't heard from me all this time because I could not make myself write, and after I got a job I have been too busy and tired. Then strange to say I have been sick and even yet I am sick and don't know what is the matter with me. I have always been so well. But I am just miserable a good deal of the time. . . You see I have feelings like anyone else. This

idea that only certain people are sensitive is not true. The man who spades in the street is sensitive, almost as much as you are. And the fact is I was just a convenience for you. I could see that you loved some one else, and that you were using me to drive that some one else out of your mind. For that matter you used to talk in your sleep, and I know things that you don't think I do. But I went on, for I am your friend, if you won't be anything else to me yourself. You have the strangest nature of anyone I ever saw, and I don't believe anyone could get close to you if you didn't want them to. I was never admitted to your life in the slightest way. I lived with you in every intimacy and was everything to you that a woman can be to a man; but I was never in your life, but always shut out of it. I never felt that I had your confidence; and some times it seemed that I didn't have your tenderness, or even your thoughtfulness. I call this the worst form of prostitution, for it takes one's life, where the prostitute only gives an hour, and for it one gets a worse shame. . . I may not be very well educated, but I have feelings; and I think I see and know almost what anyone else would. And this life at last got on my nerves. Don't think that I blame you. And on the other hand some times I think that you are the best man in the world. You have been fair with me, and even now I don't ask anything of you, and don't expect anything. How could I? But you see the worm always turns; and it is because you are too much happiness to me, and also too little that I felt that I had to go away and try for something else in life. I hope I have made myself clear. Remember me to your mother, whom I love, and wish I could still serve.

"Your friend,

"CHARLOTTE."

Kirby took this letter home to his mother. She read it through and wept. "Well," she said, "I allowed you

and Charlotte to be lovers living here under my roof, trying to have a large view of life, and after all what is it? You are like your father, Skeet, cold and hard sometimes, selfish and cruel; and perhaps that makes an artist of you, or serves you as an artist, but it makes it hard on the hearts that you really need for life, and without whose love your own life will be as sterile as a desert. I wish I had never had anything to do with this; and I never would have except for my life abroad, and perhaps just drifting along, not realizing what you and Charlotte were to each other until she had become indispensable to me. Mrs. Witherby was here this afternoon and her poor heart is broken. She made this same futile struggle for life abroad, took her children there and educated them there, and married them there. Now she is here, alone and drifting about. Oh, if people could only build up their lives against the day of loneliness by having their children marry here and be near. If it were not for you, Skeet, I should be desperate, with Myrtle's life wholly alien to mine . . . and all for this worthless thing of a title. What had I to do with that, coming as I did from the plains of Illinois? I wish your father were here to hear me make this confession. Put these thoughts in your poems about a republic. This should be known so that Americans while living for the country are more full living for themselves. Now Charlotte is gone. Go out and find her; get down on your knees to her; cleave to her; she is one of the few good women that I have known."

Kirby listened with all attention to what his mother said. If she was right, if he was cold and hard and selfish, perhaps he had been so with Becky. Perhaps he

was cruel and domineering, as she had written him in that letter of farewell before he had come on to New York desperate for love and grief of her. His mother now told him so; and Charlotte saw the same qualities in him. With what poignant intuition Becky had penetrated to the tragedy of life when she wrote him on that occasion: "Life gives us certain hours of happiness, and then takes them. I suffer because of your disappointing me both on the score of what you are by nature, and because of your life before knowing me."

Even Alicia! perhaps this secret faculty of his soul which aroused demons in other people, this faculty which Hayden saw in him, had evoked the worst of Alicia and driven her to a hostility which had almost wrecked him. And then Becky and her loss; and now Charlotte! Was he always to lose and eventually to be all alone in life, when his mother died or departed? How terrifying life is when prevised in this way, like the cold and empty spaces between disregarding stars!

The tears were in his eyes now. Far above him airplanes were wheeling, and in them were the specks, the men who were flying. Did they know these truths, these sorrows? What could he do to perfect himself, to overcome cruelty and selfishness, and these devils that swarmed whenever beauty came to him in the person of a woman and offered him life?

How wonderful are women, he thought; for even the least of them, the Charlottes, if they are the least, hold the secrets of God Himself. How calmly they tell men what the perils and pains of life are. How they bare their bosoms, and show that if happiness is not upon them, agony is in resisting them. . . What was there

to do but to gō to the war, this war which he despised, which would distract him from the artist life, that of a writer that he had dreamed of for himself all these years? He had already bought Greek books, intending to start again the study of the language; and for the third time in his life. After all was there anything peculiar to America in this defeat and postponement of his ambitions and dreams? He had money, and leisure . . . what was lacking but the vision? The tears were in his eyes now. Bob Hayden had gone away; he had intimations that he would never see that rare soul again, and there was nothing of beauty in life that did not wound him with memories of Becky. Charlotte was right; he loved some one else than herself.

One thing: had he not always excited the most active envy from the days of the school yard to this hour. It accounted for all the fights he had had at school; for his mother's attitude toward him, for the hostility of Mr. Dorsey, his law partner in Chicago . . . and Becky! Did Becky not come to see that she could not stand in an equality with him as a mind, and was it not that as much as anything else that prompted her to sharp sarcasms, intended by her, no doubt, to wound him and bring him fluttering to her hand? For this reason had she not gone into the association again of such men as Delaher and Sheridan, and such women as Minette: gay spirits and players who were content to make a show of serious interests for the sake of increasing their delights in the abandoned dance of life. But Becky: she was not a Bohemian, she was too correct for that. Yet she was too unconventional to be a society woman; her sex indulgences were hidden under all sorts of good associations

and clever implications. She was not gifted enough to be received in a literary set; yet with Delaher and Minette she could affect a literary pose. And did these things not account for her leaving the life of beauty that they had made with each other in that miraculous spring, and returning to the atmosphere of the Ritzdorf, and those parties of drink and food and miscellaneous kisses? . . . So Becky had left him. . . And now Charlotte had left him who did not fear recesses of his soul to which he retired, but wished to enter them; she did not petulantly fly them as Becky had done. Charlotte knew of this hurt in his heart; but was it love, instead of wounded pride, and that alone? Did he really love Becky and was it not true that what he felt for Charlotte, now that he could clearly appraise it, was nearer love?

The days went by, the winter came and broke, the spring descended again. He was busy but without a central purpose in his life. Perhaps this desire to write was the profound motive in his life, but there were so many things to distract it. He pursued his studies, he sketched and wrote poems, he studied the soul of America. He was already past the age when Byron had lived through his life. How mocking this was: Byron who had traveled, lived, fathomed suffering, hate, wounded love, separations, ostracism, and who had interpreted them and then gone to the grave. Much of these things of life Kirby had lived through also, but no flame had kindled in his soul. Perhaps it was never to be. Perhaps in this corn fed life he was never to come to flower, but always to aspire and to dream, and to be held back by weights of lead on his feet. He studied the soul experiences of Whitman and Emerson. They lived in this

land and were subject to like influences. But Emerson and Whitman, though late to flower, had shown their genius before this age to which Kirby had now come. And if there was to be no finding of himself for Kirby, what was life to be? Could he endure to go on?

The war still raged, and with graver prospects day by day for America's entrance into it. Something came back to him of a memory of Amiel's Journal, that record of a sensitive and entangled soul. He saw himself in that analysis, and pushed himself into taking lessons on flying. He learned that, and experienced the thrill of great spaces far above the city, the bay and the sea. He fell one day, coming perilously near to death, but it was only a severe nervous shock and a few flesh wounds. He was laid up for a number of weeks, and lay day by day thinking over all his life, wondering about Becky and where she was, and about Charlotte. Had they given themselves to others? Surely Becky had, there in Bombay or wherever she was. Was it an English officer, or some traveling translator or dilettante whom she fooled with the scraps of learning which she had picked up in her life as a careerist, and with him? Still he thought of Becky, of her whispers, her words, her adorable yielding as she lay in his arms. The memories almost drove him mad, thinking that she was, no doubt, another's, and that this denial forced upon him was to be for the rest of life. No renewal ever of these delights . . . how cruel and merciless love and life are!

Rene had come to town and with Evelyn had run out to the Island to see him as he lay convalescing from his wounds. They wanted him to go to the war as a flyer. All the women had turned Amazons and were urging the

men into the war. The Hun must be put down. God must be avenged! Liberty and truth must be saved to the world! . . . Becky was going to do something for the war. She was leaving India for England. This was no time to save one's soul, but to save the world. So she had written Evelyn; and Evelyn smiled as she reported the letter to Kirby.

It was June at last, and Kirby was still spending much of his time at the aviation field, and a little at his office. For the rest he was in his studies, and at writing. Mrs. Kirby had found another secretary; but Charlotte was not forgotten by the son or the mother. She had not returned for her clothes, and that fact argued for her reappearance. Every strange step at the door was hoped to be the returning Charlotte. And one afternoon Kirby received a telephone message at his office from his mother, saying that Charlotte was at the city hospital.

She had entered the hospital that morning giving the name of Mrs. Kirby as her only friend in the city. When Kirby arrived Mrs. Kirby was already at the bedside of Charlotte, who was quite delirious. She had been going about at her work for a number of weeks fighting down an attack of typhoid and not realizing the nature of her illness. She had been up and down, had starved herself and then indulged her hunger with fruit, and sometimes with heavy food. She had stayed for two days in her room in the boarding house, then got up and gone to the home of a girl acquaintance, who noticing Charlotte's flushed face and dilated pupils had put her hand on Charlotte's brow finding it as hot as heated iron. This girl had brought Charlotte to the hospital. The attending doctors were already pessimistic about Charlotte's

recovery; she had neglected herself too long, and the disease had made heavy progress what with her walking about and her diet.

Kirby said to his mother: "I shall stay right here and help Charlotte to make the fight." He took a room in the hospital and never left Charlotte except to take a constitutional. His mother did the same; and these two gave Charlotte every chance for life known to skill and care. She became the center of the hospital's interest; and the two nurses for the night and day service worked with desperate concern over the fluttering and fading life of Charlotte Shanley. Evelyn and Francine called, as Kirby telephoned them what was now occupying his days; and Bob Hayden sent telegrams, and wrote letters of sympathetic interest. But day by day Charlotte sank, flared and sank. Her vitality was wonderful, and except for the virulence of the disease she might have overcome it. But she was having exsanguinations within a few days; and the doctors were giving her saline injections to keep her alive. One of the greatest surgeons in the city was called in. He advised a blood transfusion. There was a chance for Charlotte's life if she could be given the blood of some healthy person, the surgeon said. Young men were to be found who for money would give their blood in a case like this. A sudden thought came into Kirby's mind: why should he not do it? If he had failed Charlotte and wounded her, was it not for him to render her this service in her fight for life? Ah! the life of self culture, the life of aspiration and art, and always something to send his soul on other errands! It was not sentiment that drove him to this sacrifice, but the stern monitions of his own analysis of fate. Some-

thing told him to do this. If he turned his will away from it, could he ever be at peace with himself? If he did it what would befall him? Perhaps death, perhaps illness, too, perhaps any disaster not to be foreseen. He felt himself caught in the forces of fate; and Charlotte's letter kept coming to his mind with its cries of love that was given and was not honored. Well, if he had not honored it, he would do the next thing, this submission to danger and this surrender of his fate to events which he could not control, budding from a sacrifice as extreme as this. . . But at last he conceived that he must be light-hearted and gay about it. He must reassure his mother; and then why make much of it if he was going to do it with the finest spirit?

He brought the surgeon to his mother to tell her that there was no danger to him in this transfusion; and to confide to her alone when the surgeon left that he had determined to do this for Charlotte, and that it would be as good for him in discipline as he hoped it would prove beneficial to the suffering woman. His mother insisted on going to the operating room and staying with them until the ordeal was over; and Charlotte and Kirby were wheeled into the white walled place of strange machines and ominous odors.

Charlotte's face was the color of old ivory, for she was almost bled to death. Her soul was fluttering like a torn banner, her eyes were rolled back under the half open lids, and she was talking with such rapidity, with such continuous indistinctness that not a word of what she said could be understood. She would be blind, the doctors said, even if she recovered; blind for the rest of her life. What a fate for the gay, vital woman who

had made life so joyous for Mrs. Kirby, and the household! and how by contrast was she now: this unrecognizable body of yellow with the brownish golden hair lying back from her forehead, making a picture of horror for Mrs. Kirby who was standing holding her son's hand as the surgeons prepared to give him gas. He pressed her hand and took a deep breath. The color of his face grew from pale and red to purple, his eyes grew very large, and opened with horrifying comprehension. Then he began to talk, to mutter, as the artery in his wrist was cut, the silver tube inserted and the rich blood of his youth given its flow to the wrist of Charlotte, whose vein was opened to receive the stream of life from the man who had kept her from the intimacy of his being. . . A few silent minutes till a pint of blood had gone into the wasted frame of Charlotte. . . Her talk became less rapid, it became quieter; it ceased at last. She seemed to be in repose. Her ears grew pink at the tips. . . But Kirby muttered and trembled as if his soul was in great agony. . . Then it was over. Charlotte acted as if she had fallen into refreshing sleep. They took her back to her room, and Kirby was put to bed there to stay for two or three days. . . Then Mrs. Kirby grew anxious about him. Suppose some of the blood of Charlotte passed into his circulation, her blood sick with the poison of typhoid! The doctors assured her that this could not happen: the flow was away from him, not toward him. But the chances! And to have her son incur this dreadful disease!

Then the next day Charlotte bled away all the blood that Kirby had given her. She would have to be helped again. And Mrs. Kirby hired a young interne to submit to a transfusion. The whole ghastly experience was re-

peated, and with the same result. Charlotte suffered a severe exsanguination. Another interne was paid for his blood, but to no avail. It was like pouring water in a sieve. Charlotte had to die.

Kirby had got up at last. He was weak, a little trembling, for it was not only the gas and the operation; it was the anxiety, the many sleepless nights when he had watched by Charlotte's side. There was much activity one morning: the nurses were hurrying in and out of Charlotte's room, and the doctors came. Charlotte was dying! All day long she lay as if becalmed, hovering upon some great brink with wide motionless wings. She was blind; she could not lift a hand; but at times she spoke. She could say "Water," then she would drift and fade away. The nurses thought more than once that she was gone, but after these sinking spells she would move or speak. The delirium seemed to have passed with the great fire which had sunk, having consumed all that Charlotte's poor body had to give as fuel to its ravages. Kirby who was sitting by the bed all day holding her hand sensed an intelligence back of her blind eyes, almost clairvoyant in its calm concentration. It was eight o'clock, and the nurses knew that the end was near. The pulse was fast fading now, and Charlotte had been fighting for breath for the past half hour or more. Suddenly between long inhalations and exhalations, as if by a sure but difficult resolution, she spoke . . . very distinctly but with soft and delicate precision, "Skeet."

Kirby was holding her hand, and he fancied that she pressed his hand slightly with these words. At any rate she had spoken, and died! And he leaned and kissed her.

They left Charlotte's body for a few minutes in the bed where she had expired. There she lay: her blind eyes

open, her wild hair lying back from her forehead . . . all of her beauty gone, a corpse only now, ready for the business of those who dispose of the refuse of life. What a business it is: this entering and wheeling out from the room the form that has just ended its desperate battle. And they came and took the body to the embalming room. Charlotte had now entered upon a path which even love could not follow. . . Then the buying of a lot and the burial, with this man and his mother as the only mourners. Then the return to the house on Long Island which seemed lonely as desolation, seeing that the face that had made it so bright and inviting should grace it no more. . .

And in a few days Kirby was in bed with typhoid too. Mrs. Kirby thought that he had contracted the disease in the transfusion. But as in all such cases the evidence was confused. There was the kiss that he had given her. One of the nurses had seen him kiss Charlotte, and she told the doctor who had come out to take care of Kirby. Mrs. Kirby did not know of this kiss, and she blamed the doctors for not taking complete care to avoid her son's infection during the transfusion. . . But his case was not a severe one. He was up in a few weeks, but with a slightly damaged heart. He couldn't be a flyer now. He had to give that up for the time, perhaps for good. There was more time now for thinking what he should do, how he should treasure and improve the gift of life. Charlotte had passed all these problems. And as of old, as he had done all through his life, he saw himself as the runner from whose hands the hands of spectators clutched and slipped. There was no one in his life now but his mother. And what were the tongues of angels without love?

CHAPTER XXX

Long days on the porch now looking at the water, the summer clouds, with his mother at his side! How dear she had grown to him at last, how understanding and devoted! Her face shone with spiritual energy and penetration, and with what delicacy and wisdom she pointed out to him the defects of his life! She had given him birth; she it was who had known him from the beginning of life. She knew his gifts and the weaknesses that threatened them; and she could be his guide. He was 38 now, and not wholly made.

"You will be yourself at 45," she said. "Only go on and strive."

Mrs. Kirby grieved more for Charlotte than she allowed her son to see. She felt that Charlotte had been wronged, that she had not had the chance in life that she deserved. But after all could her son have given Charlotte more than to marry her? Yes, he could have loved her, if it was in his heart. If it wasn't was he to be blamed? Yet Mrs. Kirby grieved for the dead woman who had not won her heart's desire. Her own life had been full of defeats as well as successes. She had become a rich woman in that melodramatic way of an unexpected inheritance of the Texas land; and then the finding of oil upon it. Before that she had known poverty in an Illinois village. She had traveled, lived in Italy, then

she had come to the help of her son, and found Charlotte, and all the life that had followed. She now wanted Myrtle to come to America and escape the war conditions. But Myrtle preferred to stay abroad. And so she devoted herself to her son, the other son Davis being still away in California, and centered in his interests there.

Kirby took to manual work to build back into health. He trimmed the apple trees and attended to the garden. For the rest he was writing a book. And the summer passed and the fall. Soon it was winter and then spring. The war became more terrible. The whole world was torn by hate, malice, falsehood, greed. Living became more difficult economically and spiritually; and all the evil forces of human nature took possession of the world side by side with the greatest heroisms and sacrifices. America entered the war. Kirby saw no good in this and deplored it. But the avalanche of world forces could not be stayed. He was too old to be needed, too defective to go to the war, if his heart had been in it. And so his mother said to him: "Since you can't go and don't want to go, see how calmly you can live and think and write with this world catastrophe roaring about you. You have a chance to be great of soul here at this place on Long Island."

And so he worked with his hands and kept up his studies and wrote, while the malefic forces, not to be stayed, took possession of the earth and while his own land sank into despotisms and into the control of fanatics. He was corresponding with Hayden, too, who shared his views about the war and the country. But his own task lay in interpreting life out of a heart that had suffered and learned.

Often he thought of what his life would have been if Charlotte had lived. She would have been blind, and his mother would have brought her back to live with them. In that case what would his relation to her have been? She would have learned to type again; she would have found her way about the house, and gone about her duties somewhat as before. He fancied all this. Then she would have become a daily influence in his thinking and living. How would it have affected him? Would he have married her at last, and so lived with a blind wife? And if so would there have been a child or children? What would all of this strange life have done for him? And at times he almost wished that it had been. There was not enough time in one life for Kirby to exhaust all the possibilities of his imagination. What richness of thought and feeling might have come to him with such a life with Charlotte; perhaps he had lost more than Charlotte's mere presence by her death. On the other hand, her death might have been his gain. Who could tell?

One day Rene came up from Baltimore. She and her husband were now separated and he had gone to the war. Rene was full of anxieties and sorrows, and she was very lonely too. She had sent word to Kirby to meet her and he had joined her for luncheon at the Brevoort. It was more than a year now since the death of Charlotte and all the while Rene had kept in mind the possible part that she had played in Charlotte's fate. Quite freely at last she began to speak of Charlotte. "She thought everything of you, Skeet. And I feel like a criminal. It has weighed on my mind."

"What?" he asked quickly.

"Why she saw me kiss you that night, and it was the next morning that she disappeared."

"I never knew that."

"Yes, but it was an innocent kiss after all. We had been having champagne, and you were perfectly charming, and so I kissed you, just as we were separating for the night. Charlotte was down the hall carrying blankets, and she saw us."

"Well, well. And so all that followed came from that kiss."

"That's what grieves me. Life is just like a little play where anything can happen from the simplest things."

How tender and womanly Rene was! She was all honesty of heart, revealing her sins without diffidence, with a charming frankness; speaking even of her promiscuous ways without any consciousness of wrong.

"I have been a very naughty woman, Skeet, according to some standards; but somehow I do not feel injured as a person."

"I do not think you are," he said.

"I have always felt so about such things. But I do see tragedies flowing from the love passion: even the pagans made many stories and dramas out of the passion of jealousy, out of the violations of æsthetics. And here I give you a kiss, and bring about the unhappiness, perhaps, in a way, the death of Charlotte. I am so sorry."

"It's the innocent trifles that produce the greatest results. I have observed it all my life. Heimarmene has been the god of my life. He is the god of consequences; and I have seen one thing bud another all through my days."

He was very lonely these days and he knew that Rene

was. She was stroking the sleeve of his coat, and looking at him with such confiding tenderness. She had already told him that she was going to live in New York now. She had been looking for a studio apartment where she could carry on her work as a painter. Perhaps she needed help. He did not want to marry anyone in the present state of his mind; but he needed a woman in his life. On her part Rene saw no use in marriage. She had said: "A time comes in one's life when marriage seems superfluous like being baptized over again, and not necessary from any standpoint. That is the way you feel Skeet, I know."

"Yes."

They were at one in their vision that they could be friends to each other. Kirby thought that perhaps Rene needed help in a money way. And she did . . . a little. She had a small income, and she could make a little; but living had grown enormously expensive. Kirby could help her and he wished to do it. "I'll help you Rene," he said.

"You are a dear. I wish you could come and live with me."

"I can't leave my mother. She is growing elderly. I can't bring her in . . . well perhaps during the cold weather we might come to a hotel, but she would not want to leave Great Neck for good. At the same time I am glad that you have come to New York to live, for now we can see much of each other. I am in every day."

Kirby's old trait of wishing to keep his freedom within his own control, a trait sharpened by much experience, instructed his declarations now while planning with Rene for what he saw was to be an alliance, a certain devotion.

She knew his heart; and it sufficed for her: let the future shape events as it would.

Later they hunted an apartment together. He knew of some, and they found one at last, where Rene brought her belongings, her pictures and her books, her treasures gathered in Spain and elsewhere, the gifts of admirers here and there, and her piano, for she played it with delicacy and fancy, with a charming spontaneousness. And thus it was that when Kirby was in town he came to Rene's, where they cooked what they wished for themselves, and read and entertained Evelyn or Francine, or visitors to the city. He brought to her pages from his book to show her and to receive her discriminating suggestions and criticisms. They were good friends, understanding and devoted friends, tenderly fond of each other. But the thing called love, if separate from a devotion of this sort, as Kirby thought it was, had gone from his heart with the wreck of the beauty which he had built around Becky.

A strength, a solidity, a stability gradually took possession of Kirby's nature. He had learned how to work and to be patient. An understanding of subtle and profound things unfolded within him, like a cinema picture becoming clearer and more complete. History meant more and more to him. The motives of life unveiled themselves to him fully. He felt at times that it was not necessary for him to read any more, not of annals, not of man; but perhaps to keep in touch with the progress of science where the march of exact truth was always showing something new. Some day he was going to write a credo, for out of life and out of the religions which fundamentally were the same and expressed the mystery

of life and man's relation to the world and death, he had drawn a wisdom which sympathized with what man had done to sense them. He loved the ritual of the Catholic Church. Religion to him was escathology and beauty, and not moralization and discipline.

One day he was telling Rene about Miss Holcomb, his teacher at Marshalltown when he was a little boy, who had given him lessons in modeling. "I have always been at work shaping myself, trying to make my lines straight or rhythmical or harmonious. The truth is, Rene, I am a very bad man, or I have been. I am not so bad as I used to be, but I am bad."

"In what way are you a bad man?"

"I have been cold, and selfish, and cruel, and jealous and envious, and full of hatreds, and all sorts of passions."

"I don't believe it."

"It's true. But I have mastered many of these things. I don't hate anyone now, nor envy anyone, nor do I feel cruel toward anyone, nor wish to injure anyone. I feel calm, forgiving, good natured; and I am thankful to the souls living and dead who have helped me. All along the way I have learned something from nearly every one. . . ."

"From me?"

"From you, my dear. All in all you are the most gifted woman I have ever known who also had the innocence of the pagan as the natural inspiration of that life."

"Well, but Charlotte."

"Charlotte was a pagan, but she was not gifted, and I said gifted. I have learned worlds of things from you."

"You are so good," she said, the tears springing to her eyes, and she sat on his lap and pushing the hair back from his forehead kissed it again and again. "Ah, Skeet, what is so beautiful in life as the wise and sweet friendship between a man and a woman? It makes me believe in God, and that He smiles when He sees human beings finding this relationship and enjoying it. Let us keep what we have, treasuring it with all our hearts . . . let us go on just this way until one of us dies."

He held her very tenderly to his breast. Then he took out of his pocket a little book and began to read to her:

" 'From anger proceedeth delusion; from delusion confused memory; from confused memory the destruction of Reason; from destruction of Reason he perishes. But the disciplined self, moving among sense objects with senses free from attraction and repulsion, mastered by the SELF, goeth to Peace. In that Peace the extinction of all pains ariseth for him, for him whose heart is peaceful the reason soon attaineth equilibrium. There is no Pure Reason for the non-harmonized, nor for the non-harmonized is there concentration, for him without concentration there is no peace, and for the unpeaceful how can there be happiness?'

"The Bhagavad Gita," she said.

"Yes, and so I could go on here and read and show you how this doctrine makes for the finding and the development of one's self. If you are looking to the making of a better world, how can it be done so well as by the self-finding and self-perfecting of human beings? This, then, is my faith. And what I wish to do is to see China and India and Greece before I die, before even I

am fixed in all my reactions and can absorb nothing more."

"That will never be with you," she said. . .

And one afternoon . . . it was in the year 1919. . . . Kirby and Rene called upon Evelyn while out for a walk. "Who do you suppose is in town . . . Becky!"

"Becky," exclaimed Kirby.

"Yes, she's back from India, with many new dresses and jewels, and full of the Indian wisdom, and is trailed by many admirers and looked after by devoted old Constance. Always something new with Becky! She was here last night for dinner, and left this Indian shawl . . . isn't it wonderful? She telephoned a few minutes ago that she was going out driving and would come for it. You'll get to see her."

Did he want to see her? Yes, to see what she had become, and if time had wrought a change in his vision of her. And this shawl! How poignantly he remembered now the shawl she used to wear in those heavenly days of love and dedication there on the Rock River . . . how she used to throw one over her shoulders and sit by the fire, and how he believed her then to be the spirit of clear simplicities, a soul who had searched for him, and found him, and given herself to him in the vision of a marriage exceptional and wonderful like the marriage of the few idealistic hearts of which the world has known. Then in an instant all the intervening years came over him, hard, sorrowful years in which he struggled to master himself. And to think she had wrought this life of pain and difficulty for him; but like the others who had clutched at him as he ran along the course of the years, perhaps she had been for his good, and had done more than any

other human being to teach him the deep secret of self-development. At any rate there was nothing in his heart now but calmness, no regret, no dark passion. And he looked at Rene whose artist soul shone in her face and intoned the musical words of her lips. . . . If he could only have the dream of her that he had had of Becky; for perhaps she was the reality of the dream, and he didn't realize it.

The bell rang and Becky entered. She was dressed in green, with green jewels. Her hair was rusty red; her eyes as elfin and brilliant as ever, and the flickering sorcery that Bob Hayden saw in her face leaped across her expression as she beheld Kirby. Her lips shot into a grin. She chuckled as of old. She extended her hand to Kirby with the quick gesture which he remembered; and again he saw how long her arm was. She began to talk vainggloriously of her friends, her distinguished men friends; of the notable men who were her correspondents on great subjects like Nietzsche and Croce; and the interpreters of myths and religions. Between it all there were references in her speech to a Mr. Douglas, as if he were known to them all. She was speaking of him as not liking this or that, of not liking the shawl for which she had come, and that he had told her to leave it and lose it. He didn't like to see her wear it . . . all in all as if he had some right to express his preferences as to her apparel and ways in general. And then turning to Kirby she said lightly: "You must be terribly grieved over Bob Hayden's death."

"Bob Hayden's death!"

"Yes, Mr. Douglas was showing me the dispatch in the afternoon paper just as I left."

"Where was he?"

"In Seattle, or near there, on a motor trip."

"I must see what I can do," said Kirby. "Sorry but I must go." And he and Rene left.

"Skeet was always a little dramatic. He doesn't need to wear his heart on his sleeve like that," said Becky when he was gone.

As Kirby and Rene walked up the street he said to her: "I have a good name for Becky. It is Bridget Calypso. Did you ever see anything to rival the combination that is in her face: something between an Irish Biddy and a dryad."

"And yet you loved her."

"And yet I loved her."

"And what is worse, you don't love anyone; and she did it to you."

"That isn't true," said Kirby reassuringly. He knew that Rene loved him, and he wanted to protect her heart against an unquiet recognition of his own. He wished with all intensity that he loved her.

They went back to Rene's apartment. Later Kirby had a dispatch, and he went west to attend the funeral of his beloved friend. Hayden had been stricken suddenly with great pain. His friends of the motoring party had gathered anxiously around the bedside. He saw their foreboding in their eyes and said to them, "You think I am afraid to die? I am afraid I can't." Those were his last words.

And Kirby stood by the coffin for long minutes studying the great brow that was soon to be dust, looking sorrowfully at the generous mouth that had spoken to him so

many words of wisdom and helpfulness. Now except for Rene and his mother he was alone in life. No friendship such as this between him and this man lying dead could ever be in life. It takes time for hearts to grow together and become one. Life is not long enough for a second flowering such as this relationship had been.

CHAPTER XXXI

It is the year 1920 and Kirby is forty-two. He has fought down the encroaching fact that life has passed thus far. Some gray hairs are sprinkled around his temples. These years have passed with incredible speed. Soon he will be fifty, and that is old. What more is there to do? He has never become a father, and does not wish now to be. He had divorced Alicia for the artifice she practiced which deprived him of having an heir. Now he does not wish an heir. Somehow he has strange dreams at night. All his life comes back to him in such weird and twisted forms, such impossible associations, and in such strange places. Why would he ever dream of Nigger Dick, and Joe Pink, the comic figures of his boyhood at Petersburg? Why would he dream of digging for treasure, and in the heat of Peter Lukins cellar there at Old Salem? There might be a symbol in that. And his grandmother . . . she came to him sometimes, looking archly at him as she did when she reproved him for the beer sign which he painted and prankishly nailed to the gable of the roof over the out door cellar, which tempted the peddlar to come in and ask his prohibition grandfather for a glass of beer. And often he dreamed of Mitch Miller. Once he went from his bedside to the bedside of Charlotte . . . indeed they were the same, the occupant changing through the necromancy of the

dream. Both had said "Skeet" to him in the throes of death. . . And he dreamed of Becky . . . always such poignant dreams always of her in her loveliest moods, when she smiled or spoke with musical tenderness. Thus all his life came before him; and often he awoke repeating:

> "I saw pale kings and warriors, too,
> Pale princes, death pale were they all.
> They said La Belle Dame sans Merci
> Hath thee in thrall."

Perhaps these words expressed the key of his life . . . the strange mystical search for truth and beauty, the enchantment that leads the soul of imagination on and on, and never satisfies it, but may abandon it to awake in some sterility of life on the cold hill side! His book was done and published . . . but it seemed not his. It had left him and gone from him and become an external creation from him; and fame, if there was to be fame, was like the treasure which he had found as a boy, and put away from him with tears because he could not enjoy it with the boy with whom he had searched for it and with whom he had found it. Who could share his happiness over the world's acclaim? His mother! Rene! and yet there was a hidden want in this. Perhaps fame had come too late, if it had come at all.

He was having some company, and he went in to bring Rene out. All the literary supplements had his picture on the front page. Rene had collected them to show him. "Oh, Skeet," she exclaimed, "just look. Are you not happy? And it is all so justified by what you have done." But he was not moved. He said to her: "That is not I,

there in the papers. That may have been I, but it is not now."

"What do you mean?"

"I have the strangest feeling, as if I had died and was looking down on myself and all this. . . it is all outside of me, gone from me like one's child that has grown up and become old, as old almost as the father."

"How strange you are. And yet you will rejoice later when you see what it means, how it will strengthen you to do greater things, as you will. You must work right on to the end of life. You are a young man."

"I am an old man, very old, having lived through all things . . . over and over."

"But you have not written all of them. Come, I'll shake up a drink. I have some gin, in spite of these dreadful days of prohibition. These fools who take from us what keeps us strong for the ardors and struggles of life."

He watched her as she prepared the drink. Something came into his mind quickly. If only Becky was as he had dreamed her; if only she would take this book and kiss it and put it away as she had done when he gave her his first little book; if only he had the heart's appreciation of the Becky of his dream. Would he then be happy? Perhaps!

They went out to Long Island taking the newspapers to show Mrs. Kirby. "I am the happiest woman in the world," she said and she kissed him. He took her in his arms, and as Rene was standing near he extended his arms to encircle her too. "Do you like Rene very much, mother?" he asked. "I do," she said. "Well, I do." Then he kissed Rene and his mother again. She pushed

him away from her the better to look at him. "What a big man you are. I didn't realize it. You look so self-contained, masterful, calm, there are laughter and kindness in your eyes. You look like some sort of a finished human being . . . made complete so to speak. Do you love me a lot?"

"I love you with all my heart."

"I don't ask for anything more," she said.

The sea breeze came up and refreshed the air. The company was soon to arrive now, but they sat on the porch and talked. "I never saw you looking so well in my life," his mother said to him. And he began to repeat:

"I saw pale kings and warriors, too."

"You had better see yourself in the glass and shave. The company will be here before you know it."

He left them to dress for the dinner. As he looked at himself in the mirror he thought again: "This is not I. Who is this?"

Was this the same person who had gone through all the experiences in Petersburg as a boy, in Marshalltown as a young man, in Chicago as a beginning lawyer, at the boarding house of Uncle Harvey; in association with Madam Lefevre, and later with Julia Valentine; and later as the fiancé of Martha Fisk, and then as the lover of Alicia Adams, and finally her husband? Was this the same person who had roamed the woods about Marshalltown with Winifred Hervey, in the spring time of life and love; and who had been sustained and inspired by the devotion of that radiant spirit? Had these eyes, looking back to him from the mirror, read these various books all along this way to forty-two years of age; and was it the

same seeing mind behind these eyes, the same today as in the long ago, that day by day through these more than ten thousand days had absorbed the outward world of nature and of men and women? Was he a central life that these accretions had not destroyed; or had he been many, many successive beings, who had flourished and sunk down into the soil that sprouted a new personality, which retained something of the face and form of all his previous selves, and something of his particular quality of spirit, as new-grown tulips resemble the tulips which sprang last year from the bulbs . . . and yet are a new growth differing from any that came before? And he remembered now a sonnet he had written long ago, when he was in something of this same mood as now. Oh, if he could write this sonnet then, and feel now as he did when he wrote it, was not this feeling the surest identification of his being, as it was now, with the being of that time, and with the being that he had always known as himself? He searched among his papers and found the sonnet. He read it and it brought back to him the understanding that he then had: that memory changes from memory of things, to memory of memories! So he had written:

Moon at the full above the October lake!
Arc of the lonely commons where no cry
Of night bird is, and where your splendors make
One tideless water, or one breathless sky!
Abandoned goblet, overturned, which pours
The sun made wine on darkening roofs and spires,
And fills the avenues lightening to the shore's
Grayer inane with shadows and with fires!
In the suspended living of this hour
I do remember how you looked, O moon,

In one October when your magic power
Timed the recession of surrendered June.
Ghost that recalls remembrance! Smiling ghost
Of memory alone, and not the lost! . . .

He was awakened out of his revery by the voice of his mother. "How soon are you coming down, son? We are waiting for you."

"Pretty soon," he called back. Then he lathered his face and shaved, repeating Keats' poem as he did so.

CHAPTER XXXII

Often these days he climbed the eminence near the little cemetery devoted to the sepulture of the lost at sea. Here he would look over the country, and at the water and far away toward the ocean.

How poorly Satan had planned the temptation of Jesus in taking him to a high mountain; for in the heights the soul can think, because it can see. There it has visions and can look over the earth and make its choice, after great comparisons and analyses vividly and immediately grasped. In the lowlands, in the valleys, in cells and prisons men cannot think and rightly decide, because they cannot see what is necessary for the material eye to use in the formation of judgments and for the making of true valuations. Only in the heights can temptations be resisted. And so from this place overlooking the water and the country for miles around, Kirby fancied that with the inner eye he could reconstruct what he had been and could estimate what he had become, and by what way he had arrived.

There were days when he felt himself very poor, and terribly desolate. He thought of his brother, who played no part in his life; of his sister, who was an alien, whom he scarcely knew, and who did not know him. They had no interests together. In thinking of his father, his heart hurt him. There had been defeat in his father's life and

loneliness, too, now better understood by Kirby than ever before. . . Nearly every one he had known was gone or dead. If he had been the runner from whose arms the hands of friendship had slipped, as he went his way, the fruits of that course were now his: he was almost alone. There was no one now but his mother and Rene to whom he could turn, or whom he saw to any extent. All the rest were friendships such as the world gives and quickly takes away. There were Evelyn and the Walters, and some others of like quality . . . but what were they in this pass of life, which cried for re-creative influences, for the richness of love?

This little fame that had come to him made him think by way of contrasting what life had brought him with what he had hoped it would bring him, of his dream as a very young man, when he planned to have a place of many acres, a wife and children, a hearty out-door life in the work of cattle raising, and the breeding of fine horses; and a great house where he could dispense a liberal hospitality to the friends of his choice. And now here he was living in his mother's house, without wife or children, without a circle of friends, scarcely orbited, without a real center of living. And what was this little fame but a few bits of gold that the miner shakes in his trembling hand, after risking life to get them and after spending the precious vitality of the best years in seeking and finding them? . . . To speak with the tongues of angels but to have not love, neither in one's own heart for another, nor from another bestowed on one, what is it? These were his depreciating thoughts many times as he sat on this height and looked around at the land and the

water. This condition of his life was the fault of his own nature; but who or what was at fault for his nature?

Had not Becky taken everything from him except these few grains of gold? In a way they were derived from her, made in large part from his experiences with her. If gold can be made from the salt of the sea, it may better be made by the alchemy of sorrow from the bitter waters of defeated love and life. And what was fame compared to life as he had visioned it, and as in incurable regret of spirit he could see the possibility of that visioned life? Becky kind and gracious as she had been at first; Becky devoted to him; Becky for him to honor and to shower with gifts of happiness; Becky his wife in a daily life of enriching interests; these years that had passed in restlessness and barren change, in hotel life, that wastes what soul would accumulate for its own stability and growth, instead of years of tranquil increase of spirit, in rich normality of deepening strength and enlarging vision! Ah, it might have been; it should have been; it was tragedy that it had not been! Even all his mother did for him did not make a settled life for him. There was something lacking. Sometimes he thought of it in terms of his library which he had lost when he was divorced from Alicia. He had accumulated other books, and restored to his shelves some of those that he had parted with when breaking life with Alicia. But all in all that part of his soul represented by the selection of books was dimmed or lost. For a library is a means of coming back to what has been, of knowing again what one has been, of becoming again one's old self, of restoring to the soul its losses suffered in the attritions of life, and in the contacts which impair one's individuality. And he had

even forgotten what some of the books were by which he had made himself, and by which he might remake himself in the old pattern. A library is the storehouse of one's soul, to be returned to again and again for renewals, to be before one in order to keep the soul in memory of what it is, and what it should continue to be. It has been selected in need, and that need may return, only to be unsatisfied if the book be not before one for which life blindly cries.

He had put Alicia away because she was barren, and what had it profited him? He had gone on . . . still he was without a child; and now would be so for the rest of his life! Ever it seemed that what he had sought had within it the seeds of defeat. He had fought circumstances, he had climbed difficult heights; he had changed himself to renew himself, and perhaps lost himself. There was nothing left but these few bits of gold, this glistening fame, extracted from his wanderings of soul and his toil amid the hard granite of circumstance. What was the ambition of the angels that it caused them to fall? They did not strive for riches, for vulgar honors; they strove to be gods, and they were cast down; and therefore was it anything but ambition itself that provoked assault upon their ascent to the great life of the highest heavens? Their fate was the fate of those who seek beauty: the seeker of beauty, too, is always spied upon and waylaid. No flower can bloom that it does not experience the symbiosis of its own particular foe out of the insect world; and every search for truth or beauty at once develops its own enemy, determined that the search shall fail, and that life that seeks shall minister to the life that thwarts. . . Was Kirby now a pessimist at last? No,

for he believed himself used by some power to some end. The doctrine of correspondence had taken possession of his imagination: there was the spiritual sun back of the material sun; and if men used animals, perhaps the gods used men; and perhaps all that he had lived and done and failed to do was to some end that he had nothing to do with, a good end toward which everything in life had led him. Everything was a part of the scheme of things and of worth in some time and place. Life was pain, but pain was growth and wisdom. The amœba senses light through its whole body; the human eye sees the light in eyes that turn and depart; and the inner eye remembers! With sight agony was born, and with agony comprehension of the spirit of man, and with that comprehension, a spiritual vision that prophesies farther visions and vaster understandings!

And Becky! Often she took on a mystical meaning to him. Why had she come into his life, and why had she left? Had she been sent to give him a vision which he had failed to attain? Had some mischievous god said: "We'll send him to her. Let us see what will happen." Perhaps it was a repetition of an old spiritual experiment in soul chemistry, which failed this time because even the god who made it, was not aware of some element in Becky's spirit which defeated the usual result? Then perhaps her wandering away, and his suffering, and this isolation, this lonely meditation here by the cemetery of the lost at sea, . . . perhaps all this was another result which the god was now studying, and which would lead to some new discovery of soul wisdom. Truly what are we and by what powers and secrets surrounded? This life of his, this suffering of his could not be understood upon the basis

of an affair between a man and a woman which did not prosper; upon the basis of a lover's quarrel. Literal facts like these, analyzed by the practical sense, did not yield the secrets of the tragedy, nor account for it.

She had assumed many forms to him, even as Ariel had done to the mariners, but she was essentially Ariel all the while. So she seemed and presented herself to him at first; so she had led him, following her sorcery over the island of his fate, and so she seemed to him as he thought of her in these days. There was something esoteric about it. And though she had looked to him hard and self-sufficient on occasions, she came back to him in dreams and memory, not in these guises, but always with her gnomic eyes, her mischievous wistfulness, her ethereal spirituality, which expressed itself in gentle smiles and radiant recognitions. Was it she with whom he had quarreled so bitterly in the Ritzdorf, and whom he had seen at last in green jewels and green silk at the home of Evelyn Lyman? Was it she whom Bob Hayden had summarized so unfavorably, whom Evelyn's intuition saw as a whimsical and selfish coquette? This was the disharmony of his dreams which kept him in perpetual indecision.

And as on the occasion when he left his friends at the cabin door on the Rock River, and walked to the tree where he had first stood with Becky, and had first listened to the music of her voice . . . as on that occasion he had walked toward the tree, fancying that she was standing there waiting for him, when it was not she, but only some summer grass bleached by the sun, which his longing imagination had counterfeited to a resemblance of her clothed in the white which she was accustomed

to wear. . . So once again he had the delusion of her presence. . .

It was a sunny afternoon in October, and he had left his mother to walk to the spot by the little cemetery where it had become his habit to sit and to seek himself through thought and dreams. Below him was the water, and across the water a forest, and the air was still. He was gazing at the withered flags at the edge of the shore, steadily gazing at them; and out of them arose the face of Becky as he had seen her when she looked at him over the brow of the hill, there at the Rock River. How smiling and beautiful she was! How like a little girl, how like a strange creature of the woodlands, of the fields of færy. Thus she materialized as a flower unfolds. And why had it not been Winifred, the lost love of his youth, who had never brought him bitterness, and never regret, except for her death? Instead, it was the face of Becky, whom he had tried with all his strength to put from his memory. So she was to be memory and memory alone; and so the face vanished amid the rushes; the breeze stirred, and the wisps of grass whispered at his feet. . . .

He rose to return to his mother at the house, wondering about the apparition, and all the days of his life in which the real face had been the most occult and absorbing influence! . . .

THE END